

The Secrets of Gita



Jayadayal Goyandka

॥ Śrī Hari ॥

The Secrets of Gītā

tvameva mātā ca pitā tvameva
 tvameva bandhuśca sakhā tvameva
 tvameva vidyā draviṇaṁ tvameva
 tvameva sarvaṁ mama devadeva

Jayadayal Goyandka

Thirteenth Reprint	2020	1,000
Total	33,500	

❖ **Price : ₹ 20**
(Twenty Rupees only)

Printed & Published by :

Gita Press, Gorakhpur—273005 (INDIA)

(a unit of Gobind Bhavan-Karyalaya, Kolkata)

Phone : (0551) 2334721, 2331250, 2331251

web : gitapress.org e-mail : booksales@gitapress.org

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Publisher's Note

We feel happy to present this volume 'The secrets of Gītā' in the hands of our readers. It is a compilation of fifteen chosen discourses of Brahmalinga Shri Jayadaya Goyandka given in his Satsaṅga and published in 'The Kalyana-Kalpataṛu' from time to time. It is not a book of literary importance but it is certainly a good guide to those who are desirous of advancement on the path of spiritual discipline.

The articles contained therein are the outcome of his long and intense Sādhana. The discourse on 'Penance' not only shows the grandeur of penance but also provides very good guidance for gradual progress. Similarly the article on 'Karma' presents an excellent exposition of Action, Wrong Action and Inaction which goes a long way to explain the secrets how to discriminate good from bad. 'God, Soul and Matter' throws a flood of light on the subject and is very helpful for newcomers in the field.

We are sure, it will prove to be a very useful handbook for Sādhakas and will take them a long way on their transcendental journey. We hope, our readers will receive this book with cordial enthusiasm.



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The Gospel of the Gītā

A certain gentleman has asked a number of questions. Expressed in our own language they read as follows:—

(1) Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Integral Divinity; He has been spoken of as God Himself (कृष्णस्तु भगवान् स्वयम्). Wherefore did the Deity, an embodiment of knowledge, draw the milk of Truth from the Upaniṣads and why did He fall back upon them?

(2) Was Arjuna lacking in faith like the modern lovers of the Gītā? If he was endowed with faith, why was the Lord forced to fall back upon verbal testimony in order to convince him and why was it necessary for Him to reveal His Cosmic Form to him?

(3) Once Arjuna had attained the knowledge of the Gītā, how did he declare later on that he had forgotten the friendly discourse that Śrī Kṛṣṇa gave him on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra? Are we to understand that Arjuna actually forgot the lesson that was taught to him by the Lord?

(4) Being told thus Śrī Kṛṣṇa said, “Arjuna! it was with a concentrated mind that I instructed you in that knowledge then. I am now unable to repeat the discourse.” Does this mean that the all-knowing Lord had lost consciousness of the past, so that He expressed His inability to reproduce the teaching? Moreover, what is meant by one’s mind being concentrated?

(5) If it be accepted that the Lord was really unable to reproduce the teaching of the Gītā, how could the sage Vedavyāsa repeat it after several days?

(6) If the Gītā represents the utterance of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself, how are we to construe the following words addressed by Bhagavān Vyāsa to the Deity Gaṇeśa:—

“O chief of the attendants of Lord Śiva, pray accept the role of a scribe in respect of this work, the Mahābhārata, which is going to be dictated by me and has been conceived by me.”* Since the Gītā forms part of the Mahābhārata, is it likewise a product of the mind of Śrī Vyāsa and are all its verses his composition?

My replies to the above questions are given seriatim below:—

(1) Forming part as they do of the holy Vedas, which constitute the exhalation of God, the Upaniṣads too are believed to be the beginningless and immortal teachings of the Lord Himself. There can be no question of the Lord falling back upon them; it was only with a view to exalting them in the estimation of the world that the Lord made use of them. Besides, the language and style of the Upaniṣads being rather complicated they are unintelligible to the generality of men. That is why for the good of mankind He extracted the essence of the Upaniṣads and gave it to the world in the nectarine form of the Gītā. In fact, the Upaniṣads and the Gītā are the same in essence.

(2) There can be no comparison between Arjuna and the people of the modern times. Arjuna was endowed with extraordinary faith and was a great believer and a beloved devotee of the Lord. The Lord Himself has acknowledged this fact in the following words:—

“You are My devotee and friend;” (Gītā IV. 3)

“You are very dear to Me;” (Gītā XVIII. 64)

“You are dear to Me,” etc., etc. (Gītā XVIII. 65)

* लेखको भारतस्यास्य भव त्वं गणनायक।

मयैव प्रोच्यमानस्य मनसा कल्पितस्य च॥

It was on account of the love of His beloved friend Arjuna that the Lord always remained by his side, nay, accepted the role of his charioteer. At the call of the present-day devotees the Lord does not appear even during their worship. Hence one should not be misled to think that Arjuna was not equipped with faith. As for the authority of the scriptures, the Lord has quoted it only in order to enhance the value of the Vedas and glorify them. Of course, Arjuna's faith was the main factor in revealing the Lord's Cosmic Form. Whatever Arjuna says in Chapter X furnishes ample testimony to his faith. He says:—

“You are the supreme Eternal, the ultimate resort, the greatest purifier; all the seers speak of You as the eternal divine Person, the prime Deity, unborn and all-pervading.

“Kṛṣṇa, I believe as true all that You tell me. Lord, neither gods nor the demons are aware of Your manifestation through Līlā (sport).”

“O Creator of beings, O Ruler of creatures, God of gods, the Lord of the universe, O Supreme Puruṣa, Yourself alone know Yourself through Yourself” (Verses 12, 14-15).

Arjuna's faith stands fully revealed in the above words. Arjuna who thus knew and described the Lord's glory addresses Him in the next discourse as follows:—

“You are precisely what You declare Yourself to be (what You have stated about Yourself in Chapter X). But, O Supreme Person! I long to see with my own eyes Your divine Form endowed with wisdom, divine attributes, energy, potency, might and brilliance.”

Arjuna was a great believer; he knew and recognized the glory of the Lord. That is why through His supreme Grace he sought to behold His divine Cosmic Form. It is His wont to fulfil the desire of His devotees; hence it is that

the Lord condescended to reveal His Cosmic Form to Arjuna. It was due to his faith that the Cosmic Form was revealed to him and not with a view to engendering faith in him. The Lord Himself says: "I cannot reveal this Form of Mine to anyone else than one who is exclusively devoted to Me. This cannot be seen through the study of the Vedas or sacrifices, or again through gifts, rituals or austere penances." Thus it is proved that Arjuna was endowed with supreme faith, dependent on the Lord and a great devotee. The Lord has given below the definition and fruit of exclusive devotion. He says:—

"O Arjuna! he who performs all his legitimate duties (such as sacrifice, charity and penance, etc.) for My sake and considering everything as Mine, and depends on Me (that is to say, recognizing Me as the supreme goal and the supreme resort is intent on attaining Me) and is devoted to Me (or in other words keeps himself constantly engaged in hearing, contemplating, meditating upon, reciting and repeating to others My names, virtues, glory and mysteries with love and in a disinterested spirit), is devoid of attachment (i. e., has no attachment for wife, children, wealth and other worldly objects) and harbours no ill-will against any living being, such an exclusive devotee of Mine undoubtedly attains Me" (Gītā XI. 55).

(3) Arjuna had particularly treasured up the teaching on Devotion in the shape of self-surrender along with the gospel of Disinterested Action as the principal lesson intended for him. Relying on the words of the Lord he considered it to be the most esoteric of all His teachings. He regarded the gospel of Self-enlightenment as secondary to that of Self-surrender and had accordingly paid scant attention to the same. On this occasion too Arjuna asks nothing about the most esoteric gospel of Self-surrender. It was ever fresh in

his memory. That is why the Lord reminds him that He instructed him in that 'secret' wisdom and revealed to him the eternal truth* (vide Mahābhārata, Aśwamedha Parva XVI. 9). The word 'गुह्यम्' (secret or esoteric) used by the Lord in this context also confirms the same view. What the Lord actually repeated after reproving him for his inattention did not contain anything about disinterested action or Self-surrender as expounded in the Gītā. He simply reproduced the teaching about Self-enlightenment which had slipped Arjuna's memory.

(4) The fact that the Lord pleaded inability to reproduce His teaching does not mean that He was really unable to do so or that He had forgotten it. It is altogether unreasonable to imagine this in the case of the Lord who is an embodiment of Truth, Knowledge and Bliss. The Lord's intention was to glorify the Path of Self-enlightenment. The Master rebukes His disciple for having failed to retain in his mind the lofty teaching that He had imparted to him. The gospel of Self-enlightenment was not such a commonplace as could be communicated for one's mere asking. His 'inability', therefore, only meant His unwillingness to impart such a lofty teaching to one who was so inattentive. Of Uddālaka, Dadhīci, Satyakāma and other sages it is believed that they imparted spiritual knowledge only once. Spiritual knowledge is a thing which has to be imparted to a fit recipient only once, not twice. That is why the Lord tells Arjuna that he committed a great blunder in forgetting the gospel of spiritual knowledge. Thereafter in deference to Arjuna's intense desire the Lord instructed him once again in that knowledge. Had the Lord no idea about it, how could He impart it to Arjuna again? By 'Yogayukta'

* श्रावितस्त्वं मया गुह्यं ज्ञापितश्च सनातनम्।

He only meant that He had imparted that Knowledge to him with a concentrated mind at that time. Thereby He told him in a reproving way that He could not repeat it to him over and over again with the same concentration of mind. He could ill afford to repeat it over and over again so that he would conveniently forget it each time. Such a behaviour was not becoming of a man like Arjuna as the same amounted to a disparagement of the holy Brahmavidyā (Spiritual Knowledge). The Lord has thus taught the world through Arjuna that a lesson on spiritual knowledge should be listened to with rapt attention and that the teacher should impart it to a fit person only who may be able to assimilate it the moment he hears it.

Even though Arjuna was not eligible for instruction in spiritual knowledge, but was qualified only for receiving instruction in Self-surrender accompanied by disinterested action and it was therefore that he was instructed in the culminating gospel of Self-surrender, which is the most esoteric of all teachings, the Lord was perfectly justified in taking him to task for having forgotten His teaching. A dedicated soul should never forget what he is taught by his beloved Deity. But this should not lead one to believe that eligibility for instruction in spiritual knowledge is superior in comparison to that for instruction in Self-surrender coupled with disinterested action. When the fruit of both is the same, neither is superior or inferior. Since Arjuna was a man of action and a devotee, the path of Self-surrender with disinterested action alone was suitable for him.

(5) That the Lord was capable of repeating everything, is clear from the above exposition. Bhagavān Vyāsa was a great Yogī; he came to know everything with the help of his occult power and repeated what he had actually heard and seen. It was no wonder that he should have done so

when through his Yogic power even Sañjaya was enabled to attain transcendental vision.

(6) The words addressed by Vyāsa to Gaṇeśa as quoted above only mean that while he reproduced some dialogues as they actually took place, he composed others in his own language and dovetailed them in the book. Out of the verses spoken by the Lord to Arjuna, he reproduced some word for word while some of the prose talk he versified and filled up the gaps by relating the story. Of course, the verses describing the reaction on the minds of Sañjaya, Duryodhana, Arjuna and Dhṛtarāṣṭra are Vyāsa's own composition. This should not however lead one to believe that the work is a mere fiction. Knowing everything through his Yogic powers he has written actual history.



Universal Appeal of the Gītā

Some friends have addressed to me a number of questions concerning the Gītā:—

Q. A number of Ācāryas or world-teachers have written commentaries on the Gītā; which of them do you consider as the best and most reliable?

Ans. I hold the commentaries of all God-realized Ācāryas as excellent and reliable.

Q. There have been more than one Ācāryas and they disagree with one another to such an extent that their views are in some cases poles asunder. While Ācārya Śaṅkara advocates Monism, Ācārya Rāmānuja holds a brief for Viśiṣṭādwaita or qualified Monism. Even so other Ācāryas have written their commentaries from diverse points of view. Such being the case, how can all these commentaries be correct? Truth, after all, is only one.

Ans. From the logical point of view, what you say is true. Suppose there are a hundred commentaries on the Gītā and they all disagree with one another. Under such circumstances each one of them runs counter to the remaining ninety-nine. Judged from this standard, none of them comes out to be infallible. But following the commentary of anyone Ācārya he who moulds his life according to the same can realize God; and judged from this criterion all such commentaries are correct.

Q. Which commentary do you regard as the best and as your guide?

Ans. I hold all of them as excellent. Of course, I follow none of them in particular, but all of them; for I pick up useful things from all and I have taken help and am taking help from many. All Ācāryas are worthy of adoration to me; hence I

view them all with reverence and believe that one can realize God by moulding one's life according to the interpretation of anyone of them. But I place the original above the commentaries; for none of the Ācāryas raises his voice against the original. On the other hand, everyone of them holds it in great esteem and speaks highly of it as the word of God; nay, all of them take their stand on the original and expect others also to follow the same. Hence the original is superior to all the commentaries.

Q. Ācārya Śaṅkara puts a monistic interpretation on the Gītā; those who swear by the cult of Devotion smell dualism in it and again those who have their leanings towards the path of Action recognize it as a treatise on Karmayoga. The question, therefore, is, Does the Gītā teach the gospel of Jñāna (Knowledge), Bhakti (Devotion) or Karma (Action)? And do the commentators strain the original so as to make it yield their own interpretation, or do they honestly hold such views?

Ans. To accuse the commentators of having strained the text so as to make it yield their own interpretation is to question their honesty; hence such a remark will be hardly justified. They have interpreted the Gītā just as they felt it should be. It goes to the credit of the Gītā that the followers of all sects revise it. The Gītā is such a mysterious book that everybody finds his own thoughts interwoven into it; for, as a matter of fact, all the various isms such as Jñānayoga (Monism), Bhaktiyoga (Dualism) and Karmayoga (the gospel of disinterested Action) have been fully discussed therein.

Q. Although the goal of all God-realized souls, the deliverer of the Gītā as well as the text of the Gītā are the same for all, how is it that the Ācāryas—who were all God-realized souls—read different meanings into the Gītā?

Ans. Although the goal of all Ācāryas is one and the same, their temperament and intellectual capacity, the latencies of their previous births and environment and the spiritual practices

undertaken by them being different, the mode of exposition and the line of reasoning vary in each case. And those very ideas appear in the mental horizon of an Ācārya which are intended by the Lord to be propagated through him in that particular epoch and he reads those very ideas and truths into the Gītā.

Q. When all the commentators differ in their interpretation, how can they all be correct?

Ans. From one point of view they are all correct, while from another point of view none of them is correct. Notwithstanding the fact that their final goal, viz., God-realization, is one and the same, their interpretations may be different. To take a homely illustration, of those who have succeeded in detecting the moon on a newmoon day, someone locates it just above the twig of a particular tree, while another describes it as touching the cornice of a particular building; a third observer draws a small curve with a chalk-stick and comparing the moon with that curve locates it exactly between the pair of claws of a particular bird flying in the horizon; while a fourth one, comparing it with a reed, points out that it appears just in front of his finger. Now, though each one of those observers aims at revealing the moon and they all give their own hint with the best of motives, their ways of describing the moon widely differ from one another. Even so, though the objective of all the Ācāryas is just the same—they all have the one aim of helping the seekers realize God—their interpretations widely differ from one another. Of course, their final goal being just the same, they are all correct. That is to say, all of them are correct in the sense that one can actually realize God by following the precepts of anyone of those Ācāryas. If, however, we join issue on the meaning of the words actually used by them, none of them will be found correct. For, to revert to the above illustration, neither is the moon located just above the tree, nor does it lie adjacent to

the house in question; neither does it occupy a position between the two claws of the bird nor does it stand facing the finger of the revealer. Nor again does the shape of the moon resemble the figure drawn by him. A disputation on words will take us nowhere.

Q. A man pinning his faith in the text of the Gītā as a divine message seeks to know the real meaning of this scripture; but a study of the various commentaries thereon confounds him and throws him in a whirlpool of doubt. Under such circumstances, what course should he adopt for a correct understanding of the Gītā?

Ans. If a man who looks upon the words of the Lord as free from error studies and deeply ponders on them according to his own lights with an unbiased mind, depending on the Lord and keeping his eye on the meaning of the actual words of the text, and with a view to moulding his life according to the same, all his doubts and misconceptions are dispelled by the grace of God and the true meaning of the Gītā automatically flashes on his mind.

Q. We come across a number of commentaries on the Gītā written by those who have not realized God. Is it possible to realize God even through a study of such commentaries by undergoing spiritual discipline according to the same?

Ans. He who looks upon the Gītā as his beloved deity and recognizes the words of the Lord as free from error, and who, while depending on the Gītā, goes on reverently and lovingly studying the original or the commentaries alone with a view to translating the scripture into his very life is taught its real meaning by the Gītā itself after correcting the misconceptions created by those commentaries.

Q. How to ascertain whether a particular commentary has been written by a God-realized soul or otherwise?

Ans. That commentary alone should be presumed to

have been written by a God-realized soul, a study of which awakens the thought of God, inspires reverence and love for the Lord and the Gītā, instils moral virtues and noble ideas and draws one close to it.

Q. When the followers of every sect and all *Sampradāya* acknowledge the Gītā and read their own ideas into it, are we to believe that the Lord preached His gospel to Arjuna bearing in mind all those ideas that would occur to its would be commentators?

Ans. It is no doubt true that the Lord knows all the ideas of the beings of the past, present and future. The Lord says in the Gītā:—

“Arjuna, I know all beings, past as well as present, nay, even those that are yet to come; but none (devoid of faith and reverence) knows Me” (VII. 26).*

Therefore, even if it is held that the Lord preached His gospel anticipating all subsequent thoughts, such a presumption would not be out of place. Besides, the gospel of the Gītā is so wonderful and true that genuine ideas of the Gītā itself automatically appear from time to time in the mental horizon of the Ācāryas preaching religion in a spirit of sacrifice and with noble intentions. Hence viewed with reverence and love, the Gītā appears to them imbued with their own ideas.

Q. What uncommon virtue does the Gītā possess, on account of which even those professing faiths other than the eternal Vedic religion feel drawn towards it?

Ans. The Gītā casts no aspersions against any individual or faith. Whatever it says is just and reasonable. It judges man by his motives and conduct rather than by his nationality or any external symbol. The whole human race

* वेदाहं समतीतानि वर्तमानानि चार्जुन ।
भविष्याणि च भूतानि मां तु वेद न कश्चन ॥

has been proclaimed as eligible for blessedness; evenness of mind, which is loved by all, has been given special prominence and accepted as the sole test of a seeker and a Siddha. Again, one can attain peace of mind even by listening to and understanding the Gītā, to say nothing of those who translate its precepts into practice. Its language, spirit, tenor, wisdom, poetry and rhythm are exceptionally sweet, beautiful, lucid and charming. That is why all classes of people feel drawn towards it.

Q. Which is better—to recite the Gītā, to chant it and understand it, or to enter into its spirit?

Ans. Fondly chanting the Gītā in a melodious voice is better than merely reciting it. If the chanting is accompanied with a knowledge of its meaning, it is all the more desirable. Entering into its spirit is even superior to the latter and moulding one's life according to its spirit is the best of all.

Q. What is the process of Sādhana according to the Gītā—is liberation attained by following the paths of Karma (Action), Upāsana (Worship) and Jñāna (Knowledge) one after another? Or do the paths of Karma, Bhakti and Jñāna lead to Mukti independently of one another?

Ans. The Gītā recognizes both the processes. Mukti is attained by following the paths of Karma, Upāsana and Jñāna successively. And it can also be achieved by following any of these paths independently. The Gītā says:—

“Some by meditation realize the Self (the Oversoul) in their own heart with the help of their pure reason; others, by proceeding along the path of Knowledge; and others, again, by treading the path of Action” (XIII. 24).*

True, there can be no Mukti without Jñāna—‘ऋते ज्ञानान् मुक्तिः’;

* ध्यानेनात्मनि पश्यन्ति केचिदात्मानमात्मना ।

अन्ये सांख्येन योगेन कर्मयोगेन चापरे ॥

but disinterested action automatically brings the knowledge of Truth to the Sādhaka by purifying his heart. The Lord says:—

“On earth there is no purifier as great as Knowledge; he who has attained purity of heart through a prolonged practice of Karmayoga automatically sees the light of Truth in the Self in course of time” (Gītā IV. 38).*

Even so the knowledge of Truth is attained through worship of God conceived as distinct from one's own self through His grace. The Lord Himself bears this out when He says:—

“With their mind fixed on Me, and their lives surrendered to Me, enlightening one another about My greatness and speaking of Me, My devotees ever remain contented and take delight in Me. On those ever united through meditation with Me and worshipping Me with love, I confer that Yoga of wisdom through which they come to Me. In order to shower My grace on them, I, dwelling in their heart, dispel the darkness born of ignorance by the shining light of wisdom” (Gītā X. 9–11).†

Of course, the practice of Jñānayoga does lead to the realization of Truth, and Liberation or God-realization surely follows the realization of Truth.

Q. Can Bhaktiyoga and Jñānayoga co-exist with Karmayoga, Karmayoga and Jñānayoga with Bhaktiyoga, and Karmayoga and Bhaktiyoga with Jñānayoga?

* न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते ।

तत्स्वयं योगसंसिद्धः कालेनात्मनि विन्दति ॥

† मच्चित्ता मदगतप्राणा बोधयन्तः परस्परम् ।

कथयन्तश्च मां नित्यं तुष्यन्ति च रमन्ति च ॥

तेषां सततयुक्तानां भजतां प्रीतिपूर्वकम् ।

ददामि बुद्धियोगं तं येन मामुपयान्ति ते ॥

तेषामेवानुकम्पार्थमहमज्ञानजं तमः ।

नाशयाम्यात्मभावस्थो ज्ञानदीपेन भास्वता ॥

Ans. Bhaktiyoga as well as the Knowledge of the reality of God can co-exist with Karmayoga, but Jñānayoga or worship of God as one's own self cannot; for while Karmayoga presupposes the consciousness of diversity and the existence of the world, Jñānayoga is attended with the sense of unity and the negation of the world. Hence, being characterized by conflicting attitudes of mind, Karmayoga and Jñānayoga cannot co-exist.

Even so, while Karmayoga and the Knowledge of the reality of God can co-exist with Bhaktiyoga (the worship of God as different from one's own self), Jñānayoga or worship of God as one's own self cannot; for one cannot worship God both as one's own self and as distinct from oneself at the same time, the two practices being marked with conflicting attitudes of mind.

Again, while actions enjoined by the Śāstras are compatible with Jñānayoga, Karmayoga and Bhaktiyoga are not. For while Jñānayoga is characterized by a feeling of nonduality, Karmayoga and Bhaktiyoga are marked by the feeling of duality. That is to say, whereas Bhaktiyoga and Karmayoga are not compatible with the consciousness of unity, they can exist with one another inasmuch as the feeling of duality and the existence of the world are equally present in both.

Q. Of the God-realized Ācāryas, whose doctrine is flawless?

Ans. The creed of all God-realized Ācāryas is proclaimed by their respective followers as the truth; but the real truth is the ultimate goal sought by all, and that is the same in every case. The creed of each is held to be the truth because its recognition as such gives fillip to one's Sādhana. Hence it is but reasonable to treat it as such; and all ways of approach enunciated by God-realized Ācāryas, being

conducive to Liberation for the faithful, are infallible, while none of them can successfully stand the test of reason.

Q. Which do you regard as superior-duality (worshipping God as distinct from the worshipper) or non-duality (worshipping God as one's own self)-and which of the two do you proclaim as better?

Ans. I regard both as superior and I declare any of these two forms of worship as superior for him who is qualified for that particular form.

Q. How do you make out who is qualified for which form of worship?

Ans. He who has faith in and a leaning towards a particular form of worship is qualified for that form. But so long as one's faith and inclination are not ascertained, I consider repetition of the Divine Name, meditation on His form, association with holy men and the study of sacred books as commendable for all types of seekers.

Q. Which particular name of God do you prescribe for repetition, and which form of His do you recommend for meditation to a seeker?

Ans. A seeker is asked to mutter any name of God, such as Om, Śiva, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa, Hari and so on, which he has been repeating, and to concentrate his mind on whichever form he has been meditating upon, no matter whether it is embodied or disembodied, Saṁgha or absolute; or he is recommended that very name and form which evoke his faith and liking. Or again my advice is guided by the reaction produced in my mind by the thoughts of the questioner.



My Birth and Works are Divine

The divine nature of the Lord's birth and works is a deep divine secret and known wholly to the Lord Himself and partially to those devotees who might have seen His divine form face to face. But even those who might have partially known the divine Truth, may not be able to describe it exactly as they know it; for we see, in our ordinary life, that a man cannot describe even commonplace subjects as he knows them. How can a man describe the Divine. Even the Śāstras have not dealt with the subject in an exhaustive and incisive manner. I really feel diffident to say anything in this connection, but simply for the sake of self-edification I shall here submit a few words.

The birth of Śrī Bhagavān is divine, super-physical and miraculous. This divine secret might hardly be known to one out of millions. One who has grasped it is liberated from the bondage of birth and death. Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself says in the Gītā:—

जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यमेवं यो वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ।
त्यक्त्वा देहं पुनर्जन्म नैति मामेति सोऽर्जुन ॥

(IV.9)

“O Arjuna, one who knows thus in essence that My birth and work are divine, having abandoned this body, is not subjected to rebirth but comes unto Me.”

Those who do not know this secret often say that it is neither possible nor conceivable for the unmanifest Supreme Reality consisting of truth, knowledge and bliss to put on an appearance; for, they say, the Omnipotent Supreme Lord is in His infinite fulness equally pervasive of all existences and cannot therefore appear in a particular place, body or time. There are various other contentions also. But all these need not cause any alarm.

For it is quite natural for a man not to believe in a thing, even in our ordinary life, without some tangible proof for it. For such a mind, then, not to believe in things divine is not something unnatural. God is not a physical phenomenon which could be proved by bringing it under physical appliances in a scientist's laboratory. The Divine is altogether a different subject and has a different way of dealing. The only right royal road to it is love and faith and constant devotion. It is not in human power to bring the Divine before the physical mind. A vision of the Divine is possible only for one who is endowed with the eye of devotion. Says the Lord:—

भक्त्या त्वनन्यया शक्य अहमेवंविधोऽर्जुन ।
ज्ञातुं द्रष्टुं च तत्त्वेन प्रवेष्टुं च परन्तप ॥

(Gītā XI. 54)

“It is only by exclusive devotion, O Arjuna, that I can be perceived in this form, known in reality and entered into or unified with.”

A little consideration of the matter will show that this is quite reasonable. The Lord appeared out of a pillar before Prahlāda. We have numerous evidences in the scriptures to show that the Lord thus appears whenever and wherever He likes. The Omnipotent Lord can even bring that which is impossible within the region of possibility. If He exists everywhere, what is there to make it impossible for Him to appear out of a pillar. If one contends that, because He is infinite, He cannot be conceived to have put on a finite form, he must pause for awhile to place before him the many elemental substances of the universe in both their extensive as well as limited embodied forms. For instance take the case of fire, although the analogy does not fully apply here; for no finite object can ever be perfectly illustrative of that which is infinite. But it will go a long way to meet the contention and show its futility. Fire, as an element in its fundamental

existence, is unmanifest and equally extended throughout the universe. But friction causes it to manifest itself in form from wood or flint or a match or any other thing. It can be manifested in any one place or many places at one and the same time, and, wherever it manifests, it manifests with all its power. No flame of a burning fire, however small in appearance, can be regarded as not having in it the intensity or fulness of the extensive universal element. Wherever a fire burns, it burns with all its burning and lighting power and, when necessary, can extend in its universal form and can burn the universe itself to ashes. Thus fire, though always existing in its fulness, can manifest itself in a finite form in one or more places at a time. Likewise, the all-pervading and the all-knowing unmanifest Divine, though always pervasive of all existences, can with His full might and light manifest Himself in a particular place or simultaneously in many places. Thus there is nothing more rational than the coming in form of the Divine.

Then there are people who cannot understand why and how is it necessary for the Lord, who is Omnipotent and who could, only by a turning of the mind, punish Rāvaṇa and Kaṁsa and other such like persons in an instant, to descend into this world in the person of Śrī Rāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa. But this, too, is not a rational way of thinking; for a human mind has no right to think of the actions of the Divine in its own terms. Those steeped in ignorance are generally led away by such doubts. However, there may be a number of causes of the descent of the Divine, known best to the Divine Himself. But, according to our dim light, one of the causes seems to be His Will of grace for humanity which impels Him to take on forms and place before men a lofty ideal and an easy and convenient way to perfect bliss, by following which numberless men of contemporary and future generations reach the highest goal.

The birth and forms of the Divine Lord are themselves divine and they are always a divine secret. The Lord does not take His birth in a human way. When Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa appeared in the prison cell before Vasudeva and Devakī, as described in Śrīmad Bhāgavata, it was not a human birth. The unmanifest Saccidānanda Brahma, by dint of His Līlā, appeared there in the form of Viṣṇu with His conch, disc, mace and lotus flower. He appears and again disappears by way of Līlā. It is not like our birth and death. We have to remember that He is the Divine Lord. A Yogī, too, has the power of disappearing at will and appearing again in the same form before men. His disappearance is not regarded as death. When such is the power of a Yogī, as endorsed by Maharṣi Patañjali, there is nothing strange about the appearance and disappearance of the Lord-in-form. To the eye of the generality, of course, the descent of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa was a human birth, although in reality it was not a birth but an appearance-a manifestation. Says Śrī Śukadeva in Śrīmad Bhāgavata:-

कृष्णमेनमवेहि त्वमात्मानमखिलात्मनाम् ।
जगद्धिताय सोऽप्यत्र देहीवाभाति मायया ॥

(X. xiv. 55)

“Know this Śrī Kṛṣṇa to be the Self of all living beings. He (comes) here for the welfare of the world (and) looks like an embodied soul by His Māyā (illusive power).”

When Śrī Bhagavān appeared in His supra-physical divine form, mother Devakī addressed Him thus:-

उपसंहर विश्वात्मन्नदो रूपमलौकिकम् ।
शङ्खचक्रगदापद्मश्रिया जुष्टं चतुर्भुजम् ॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavata X. iii. 30)

“O Self of the Universe, conceal this Thy transcendent form with four arms adorned with the conch, the disc, the mace and the lotus.”

On being requested thus by Devakī, Śrī Bhagavān

concealed His four-armed form and put on a new-born baby's form with two arms.

इत्युक्त्वाऽऽसीद्धरिस्तूष्णीं भगवानात्ममायया ।

पित्रोः सम्पश्यतोः सद्यो बभूव प्राकृतः शिशुः ॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavata X. iii. 46)

“Having said this, Śrī Hari became silent and by His own Māyā (power of manifesting), before the eyes of the parents fixed on Him, appeared as a human child.”

This clearly proves the manifestation (and not the birth) of Śrī Bhagavān. In the Gītā also, on being requested by Arjuna, Śrī Bhagavān is stated to have shown to him His universal form, and, on being requested again, He appeared with four arms, and in the end reappeared in His human form with two arms. This shows that Śrī Bhagavān abides by the wishes of the devotees and vouchsafes to them His vision in whatever form they desire and withdraws it again. Now those who look upon the appearance and disappearance of Śrī Bhagavān as a human birth and death, do not understand the truth of the thing. Śrī Bhagavān, pointing out the divine nature of His birth, says to Arjuna:—

अजोऽपि सन्नव्ययात्मा भूतानामीश्वरोऽपि सन् ।

प्रकृतिं स्वामधिष्ठाय सम्भवाम्यात्ममायया ॥

(Gītā IV. 6)

“Though being unborn and imperishable and the Lord of all beings, I, standing over My nature, become manifest by My Yogamāyā (Divine power).”

The words अपि (although) and सन् (being), used by Śrī Bhagavān, indicate that those who do not understand the truth of His appearance regard Him as born, even though He is unborn. When He conceals His divine form these ignorant people think Him to be dead, even though He is imperishable. When He by His Līlā (independent will) puts on human form, He appears like an ordinary mortal man, to

those who do not know the truth, in spite of His being the Lord of all beings.

Thus it is proved that the appearance or disappearance of Śrī Bhagavān is not of the nature of human birth and death. Had His birth been like that of a mortal man, it would not have been possible for Him to change form in an instant, as He did before Devakī and also before Arjuna.

One should not think that the Divine form of Śrī Bhagavān is liable to destruction as the mortal body of a man. A dead body remains lying on the earth. But the divine bodies which Devakī and Arjuna saw could not be found here after their disappearance. Nay, the body with which Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa performed various Līlās on earth, for the good of the world, for a period of 125 years, could not be recovered after its work was finished. He made His exit with that Līlā-serving body to His highest abode. Even after that, whenever His loving devotees wanted, the Lord in that same beautiful violet form appeared before them and blessed them. Had that body perished, how could it reappear thus after having left for the highest abode?

This means that, in fact, the disappearance of the Lord-in-form constitutes His returning to His Original transcendental plane, and not the destruction of His personal form like that of a mortal body. Śrīmad Bhāgavata also says:-

लोकाभिरामां स्वतनुं धारणाध्यानमङ्गलम् ।
योगधारणयाऽऽग्नेय्यादग्ध्वा धामाविशत् स्वकम् ॥

(XI.31. 6)

“Śrī Bhagavān left for His Abode without having burnt, by the fire of the absolute concentrated holding of Yoga, His body which is charming to the eye of the people and a giver of all blessings when held in concentration and seized completely.”

The appearance of the Lord is entirely dissimilar not only to the birth of all physical bodies, but also to the appearance of the Yogīs. It is divine and nothing but divine. The Lord,

standing over His fundamental Nature, appears by the power of His Yogamāyā. All creatures of the world, whether big or small, animate or inanimate, are subject to the control of the Cosmic Nature and dominated by their own qualities, actions and natural inclinations and habits, and have to accept joys and sufferings according to their past actions. The Yogīs are not, like ordinary mortals, subject to the Māyā of the Lord or to their natural inclinations and habits. But they do not appear in this world like Śrī Bhagavān, as standing over the Divine Nature and with an independent will in its own mood and play, subject to no law of nature, as a mere Līlā or sport. Śrī Bhagavān does not appear in the world subject to any natural law or principle other than His own sweet will prompted by compassion for His own creatures. This is what the Gītā conveys by the following line:-

प्रकृतिं स्वामधिष्ठाय सम्भवाम्यात्ममायया ॥

His appearance, in human form, is a mere play (Līlā) on His part, while the birth of creatures is full of suffering. Śrī Bhagavān is wholly independent in the matter of His manifestation, while the birth of creatures is not in their own hands. The birth of Śrī Bhagavān is actuated by His boundless compassion for His creatures, while the cause of the birth of creatures is their past good or evil actions. The bodies of creatures are mortal, sinful, subject to disease and are created out of a combination of the five elements of nature, while the body of Śrī Bhagavān is purely divine and above nature. It is not made up of the elements. Says Brahmā, the Lord of Creation, in Śrīmad Bhāgavata:-

अस्यापि देव वपुषो मदनुग्रहस्य

स्वेच्छामयस्य न तु भूतमयस्य कोऽपि ।

नेशे महि त्ववसितुं मनसाऽऽन्तरेण

साक्षात्तवैव किमुतात्मसुखानुभूतेः ॥

“O Lord, none can know the greatness even of this, Thy divine form, which is not made of the five natural elements but has been acquired in accordance with the wishes of Thy devotees for blessing me. Much less can we know even by Samādhi (absolute concentration) Thy real being, solidified of Truth, Bliss and Consciousness.”

Here, too, it is emphasised that the body of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa is not made of the five nature-elements as we ordinarily know them. It is the body of His will, made of His divine nature which is beyond sin and virtue and therefore free from all diseases and pure. Because God Himself, who is a compact mass of knowledge and bliss manifests in a particular form, that form is called All-Blissful. It is Bliss itself personified or Love appearing as embodied. That is why one who knows Śrī Śyāmasundara representing perfect bliss and love and beauty in that form, knows the truth and is driven into raptures of Divine Love and merged in Ānanda. Love and Ānanda are, in fact, one and the same thing; out of love one finds himself in Ānanda. The Divine Lord is not visible and cannot be visible without a product of nature, to the physical eye of mortal men and therefore Śrī Bhagavān manifests Himself with the purest essence of His Divine Nature i. e., in a form made of the divine essences, which the Yogīs experience as divine word, divine touch, divine form, divine flavour and divine odour. When Śrī Bhagavān extends His grace to His loving devotees and gives them the power of seeing Him face to face and has a heart-to-heart talk with them, He does so by taking with Him these purest essences of His divine nature. Because it is colour alone which is visible to the human eye, He puts on a form with colour; because skin alone can be touched, He makes Himself perceptible by touch; and because the human organ of smell perceives odour alone, He puts on a cover full of divine perfume. Likewise, the human intellect

and mind, being the effects of the threefold nature, are capable of reflecting on and grasping only such things as are associated with Māyā. Hence in order to make Himself fully known to His devotees along with the attributes of His Divine nature that the Unmanifest, All-Pervading, All-conscious and All-blissful God manifests Himself in form. The truth of His thus manifesting Himself in nature is not realized by all, and therefore Śrī Bhagavān says in the Gītā:-

नाहं प्रकाशः सर्वस्य योगमायासमावृतः ।
मूढोऽयं नाभिजानाति लोको मामजमव्ययम् ॥

(VII. 25)

“Enveloped as I am with My Yogamāyā, I am not visible to all and therefore this ignorant world does not know Me in My real nature as the unborn, imperishable, Supreme Being (i. e., thinks Me to be a creature subject to birth and death).”

Not knowing the truth, the ignorant despise Śrī Bhagavān and circumscribing the unlimited powers of the Lord, say that the All-conscious and All-blissful Supreme can never appear in a manifest form. They regard the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, not as the Supreme Spirit, but only as a mortal man. To think of Śrī Bhagavān in these terms is to offer Him an insult. So it is said in the Gītā:

अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम् ।
परं भावमजानन्तो मम भूतमहेश्वरम् ॥

(IX. 11)

“The ignorant, not knowing Me, the Lord of all existences, in My transcendent being, look upon Me as lodged in this human body and think little of Me, i.e., take Me to be an ordinary man and not the Divine Lord come down, for the uplift of the world, concealed in His Yogamāyā (deluding Power).”

Thus we come to the conclusion that the Unmanifest, All-pervading Supreme Being, in order to extend His grace to His creatures, comes down from time to time, with His

divine form, for the establishment of Dharma (the law and order that holds the Universe). One who realizes the truth of the Absolute, Unmanifest and Everlasting Supreme, who is all-truth, all-knowledge, and all-bliss, descending into this mortal world of ours with His immortal divine body, he and he only, by the grace of the Lord, attains to the highest status.

As the birth of Śrī Bhagavān is divine, so His works, too, are divine. Therefore one who knows the divine nature of the works of the Divine reaches the supreme abode. What that divineness of the works of the Lord is and what its realization, and how does it result in liberation, let us now see. The works of the Divine are full of selfless compassion, equability, freedom, generosity, perfection and love, and are beyond not only all that is human but beyond even the way of the perfected Yogīs. He is Omnipotent, is possessed of all powers, and can at will make possible all that is impossible; yet, He would not transgress His own laws. The All-knowing and All-blissful Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa came to this world and, extending His grace to it, established the Dharma and blessed the creatures. When the Lord was in Brindaban, the cowherds and their womanfolk, the Gopīs, enjoyed His Līlā (a perfectly conscious and purposeful sport) of childhood in a rapturous state of delight. Not one of those who knew the truth could keep himself aloof from it and deprived of its rapturous Ānanda. To hear the sweet notes of His flute was a ravishment to the heart not only of men but of beasts and birds also. All His movements in body and words of mouth were superhuman, not capable of being imitated by men. Even in His advanced age His superhuman way of doing things captivated the hearts, at every step, of His lovers who knew the truth behind. Arjuna was so much captivated by the grace of His movements that he became a tool in His hand, ever ready to do His bidding.

There could never be a duty for the Lord to be discharged, yet He performed duties to show the right way of doing things to men. The Lord thus points out the significance of His works when He says:—

न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।
नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ॥

(Gītā III. 22)

“O Arjuna, there is nothing for Me to do, nor anything unattained to be attained by Me, yet I do works (as one duty-bound).”

The Lord loved equality of mind (समता) as well and He thus extols it:—

सुहृन्मित्रार्युदासीनमध्यस्थद्वेष्यबन्धुषु ।
साधुष्वपि च पापेषु समबुद्धिर्विशिष्यते ॥

(Gītā VI. 9)

“He who regards impartially lovers, friends and foes, strangers, neutrals, foreigners and relatives, also the righteous and unrighteous, he excelleth.” Śrī Bhagavān not only preached this impartiality in the Gītā, He also practised it in dealing with friends and foes alike. At the commencement of the Mahābhārata war, both Arjuna and Duryodhana went to Dwarka and sought help from Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He placed before them Himself on the one side and His army known by the name of ‘Nārāyaṇī Senā’ and representing one Akṣauhiṇī (which means an army consisting of 21,870 elephants, the same number of chariots, thrice as many or 65,610 horses and 1,09,750 infantry, in all a combined force of 2,18,700) on the other and asked them to choose between the two, adding that He would remain absolutely unarmed in the battle. This shows that He treated Arjuna and Duryodhana equally. But here we must consider a point of great importance. Arjuna was the dearest friend of Śrī Kṛṣṇa:

they were really one, though appearing in two forms. In the 'Mousala Parva' of the Mahābhārata Vasudeva, father of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, says to Arjuna:—

योऽहं तमर्जुनं विद्धि योऽर्जुनः सोऽहमेव तु।
यद् ब्रूयात्तत्तथा कार्यमिति बुध्यस्व भारत॥

(VI. 21-22)

“Realize, O Arjuna, what Śrī Kṛṣṇa meant when he told me, whatever I am, that know Arjuna to be; and whatever Arjuna is, know that to be Myself, and do what he (Arjuna) tells you to do.”

In the Bhagavadgītā also Śrī Bhagavān says:—

भक्तोऽसि मे सखा चेति रहस्यं ह्येतदुत्तमम्।

(IV. 3)

“Because thou art My lover and friend, I tell the supreme secret to thee.”

In spite of this dearest tie of friendship and love with Arjuna, Śrī Bhagavān feels no hesitation in offering help to His dire enemy Duryodhana with an equal and impartial mind. Our human mind looks upon a foe of our friend as our own enemy and Śrī Bhagavān Himself spoke in that vein when He was out on His mission of peace between the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas.

यस्तान्द्वेष्टि स मां द्वेष्टि यस्ताननु स मामनु।

ऐकात्म्यं मां गतं विद्धि पाण्डवैर्धर्मचारिभिः॥

(Mahābhārata, Udyoga. VII. 28)

“He who is the enemy of the Pāṇḍavas is My enemy and he who is on their side is on My side. I am not anything different from the Pāṇḍavas who tread the path of Dharma (righteousness).”

In spite of all this Śrī Kṛṣṇa helped Duryodhana with His whole army. Who is there in the world who would help an enemy of his own beloved friend to fight against him? But the equality of the mind of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is not

a human quality that undergoes changes under pressure of circumstances. And Duryodhana was fully satisfied with his success in his mission to Dwarka, having secured the whole military strength of that State to his side. He thought, his diplomacy had prevailed over Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself and hoodwinked Him.

कृष्णं चापहतं ज्ञात्वा सम्प्राप परमां मुदम्।
दुर्योधनस्तु तत्सैन्यं सर्वमादाय पार्थिवः॥

(Mahābhārata, Udyoga. VII. 24)

Duryodhana did not realize the greatness of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and looked upon the large-heartedness, impartiality and nobility of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's mind as 'the virtue of an ass' (to use a modern phrase). Those who do not realize the greatness of master-minds, cannot discern in their actions an unceasing flow of compassion, impartiality and generosity. Duryodhana's state of mind on this occasion is a good illustration of this fact.

Whatever Śrī Kṛṣṇa did was informed with perfect impartiality, selflessness and unattachment. No action ever affected Him in anyway. He says in the Gītā:—

चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः।
तस्य कर्तारमपि मां विद्ध्यकर्तारमव्ययम्॥
न मां कर्माणि लिम्पन्ति न मे कर्मफले स्पृहा।
इति मां योऽभिजानाति कर्मभिर्न स बध्यते॥

(IV. 13-14)

“O Arjuna, by divisions in qualities of nature and their actions, I have evolved the four classes of Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras; know Me to be their author, the immutable Supreme Lord, as a non-doer. For I covet not the fruit of actions, nor do the actions affect Me. He who thus knows Me in reality, he, too, is not bound by actions.” Again, He says:-

न च मां तानि कर्माणि निबध्नन्ति धनञ्जय ।
उदासीनवदासीनमसक्तं तेषु कर्मसु ॥

(IX. 9)

“O Arjuna, these actions do not bind Me, seated as I am above them and unattached to them.”

To say nothing of Śrī Bhagavān Himself, even the knowers of the truth attain to the state where actions cannot bind them. Now let us see what is meant by knowing the truth of all that has been said in the verses quoted above. This consists in realizing the fact that Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa had no attachment to actions, no inequality, no desire of return. He who knows that attachment to action, desire of fruit and inequality of mind are binding chains and, knowing this abandons them and engages in action free from all egoistic turn of mind, knows the truth of action and acts accordingly. One who works with such a knowledge is not bound by actions. Just as we see that mercury, arsenic and other such metallic substances, when refined and purified, act as the most effective medicines in certain chronic diseases, even so all our actions, when perfectly freed from all impurities like inequality of mind, egoism, desire for return and attachment, act not as a binding but a liberating force.


If a poison is mixed with milk, none would drink it except a fool. One has, however, to realize that attachment and egoism and desire and inequality of mind produce an effect more detrimental than that of a deadly poison and throw man again and again into the whirlpool of birth and death. He who knows this, is freed from the binding forces and gets liberated, leaving nothing to be done.

There are many other divine elements in the works of Śrī Kṛṣṇa which we cannot understand and those who do understand them a little, can hardly explain them to others. We are after all mortal men. Even seers and sages as well

as gods were enraptured and infatuated to see the various Līlās of the Lord. We are told in Śrīmad Bhāgavata that once the Lord of creation, Brahmā, himself was infatuated by the Līlās of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Brahmā led away all the cowherd boys with their calves to a cave and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, knowing this, instantly created their exact copies and none of the Gopīs or the cows came to know anything of what had happened. Strange that Brahmā the very Lord of creation should have thus fallen a victim to infatuation. But nothing is impossible for the Divine Lord. He can bring what is impossible within the region of possibility. Such deeds of a divine nature cannot be performed even by Yogīs, to say nothing of ordinary human beings.

The divine nature of the Lord's birth and actions is a deep fathomless mystery. Arjuna was the dearest friend of the Lord and therefore He condescended to unfold that secret to Arjuna.

He who knows in reality the divine character of the Lord's birth and works, knows the Divine in reality. Therefore we should all make strenuous efforts to know that truth. The greater the knowledge of this truth, the higher state of bliss one would attain to and the nearer to the Supreme Lord will he reach. The works of such a seeker after the Divine would be covered over by a divine grace and light and he will find himself more and more on the path of divine love and before long will reach the supreme goal.



The Four-armed Divine Form in the Gītā

A friend asks what was the Form which was revealed to Arjuna by Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa after the former's prayer as contained in verses 45 and 46 of chapter XI of the Gītā? Was it a human form or a Divine Form? If it was a Divine Form, why does Arjuna say in verses 41 and 42 that he possessed no knowledge of its greatness and glory? In reply to this question, it can be said:—

In the 11th chapter of the Gītā, verse 45, Arjuna said:—

तदेव मे दर्शय देवरूपं प्रसीद देवेश जगन्निवास ॥

This may mean—

“O Lord, show me that Form only; O Lord of the gods, O Abode of the universe, be gracious.”

It may also mean—

“O Lord, show me only that Divine Form; O Abode of the universe, be gracious.”

If the words ‘देव’ and ‘रूपम्’ are combined, the meaning clearly becomes ‘Divine Form’. If they are kept separate, ‘देव’ becomes a vocative case. There being another vocative in the word ‘देवेश’, it is not necessary to treat this ‘देव’ as a vocative; but there is no harm, if it is so treated. In most Sanskrit commentaries on the Gītā, the word has been treated as a vocative, a note of address. In the edition of the Gītā published by the Gita Press, it has been explained in the vocative sense. Accepting the word even in this sense, Arjuna's prayer in the verse should be understood as a humble supplication for manifestation of the Divine Form, ‘देवरूप’. For in the verse 46, Arjuna clearly says:—

किरीटिनं गदिनं चक्रहस्तमिच्छामि त्वां द्रष्टुमहं तथैव ।

तेनैव रूपेण चतुर्भुजेन सहस्रबाहो भव विश्वमूर्ते ॥

“I wish to see You again like that with the Crown on

head, with mace and discus in Your hands. O God, O Thousand-armed, assume again the four-armed Form.”

There are proofs in the Mahābhārata, Bhāgavata and other scriptures that from time to time Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa revealed Himself not only before Arjuna, but also before others, in the four-armed Form.

पर्यङ्कादवरुह्याशु तामुत्थाप्य चतुर्भुजः ।

“Stepping down from the couch, Śrī Kṛṣṇa lifted up Rukmiṇī with His four arms.”

(Bhāgavata X. Lx. 26)

न ब्राह्मणान्मे दयितं रूपमेतच्चतुर्भुजम् ।
सर्ववेदमयो विप्रः सर्वदेवमयो ह्यहम् ॥

“Even My form with four arms is not dearer to Me than the Brāhmaṇa. A wise Brāhmaṇa is an embodiment of all Vedas, and I of all the gods.”

(Bhāgavata X. Lxxxvi. 54)

तया न सम्यक् प्रतिनन्दितस्ततस्तथैव सर्वैर्विदुरादिभिस्तथा ।
विनिर्ययौ नागपुराद्गदाग्रजो रथेन दिव्येन चतुर्भुजः स्वयम् ॥

“Receiving Kuntī’s blessings and honour from Vidura and the other assembled people, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, possessing four arms, took His seat on the divine chariot and came out of Hastinapur.”

(Mahābhārata, Aśva. L. II. 54)

सोऽयं पुरुषशार्दूलो मेघवर्णश्चतुर्भुजः ।
संश्रितः पाण्डवान् प्रेम्णा भवन्तश्चेनमाश्रिताः ॥

“He is a lion among men, He possesses the colour of cloud and four arms; out of Love He has subordinated Himself to you, Pāṇḍavas, who have taken refuge in him.”

(Mahābhārata, Anu. CXLVIII. 22)

On the authority of these verses, the four-armed form may no doubt be regarded as a human form, but this cannot be accepted with reference to the verse in the Gītā which is under consideration. For in verse 48, the Lord brought out the glory of His Cosmic Form by saying that “neither by the

study of Vedas, nor performance of sacrifices,” etc., He could be seen in that form, and again in verse 53 He repeats the praise almost in the very same terms. This praise cannot be taken to be a praise of the Cosmic Form, for a repetition of praise of the very same form in passages so close to each other cannot be held to be reasonable.

Secondly, in verse 54 the Lord says that this Form of His can be seen by one who possesses single-minded devotion; but with reference to the Cosmic Form He already stated that “this supreme, shining, Cosmic Form was not seen by anyone else but you. In this human world, I cannot be seen in this form by anyone else but you, neither by the study of the Vedas, nor performance of sacrifices, charities, rituals, or rigorous penances.” It does neither mean that through single-minded devotion the Cosmic Form of the Lord cannot be seen, nor does it mean that the Lord is incapable of manifesting that Form again. The meaning is that the Form which was revealed before Arjuna, cannot be revealed before any other soul. For that was the time of the Mahābhārata war; Bhīṣma and the principal warriors on both sides were seen stuck up between the teeth of the Lord. This Form does not always remain, It goes on continually changing, therefore the Lord clearly stated that in “this human world, this Form was neither seen by anyone before, nor can it be seen again in future.” Sañjaya, no doubt saw that Form, but he was a contemporary of Arjuna. Before the Gītā, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa revealed the Cosmic Form once again in the court of the Kauravas, but that Form was different from this Cosmic Form. The third point is that for a vision of this extremely great Cosmic Form it was necessary to possess the divine eye. The Lord opened this sight of Arjuna by saying “I give you the divine sight, see My Yoga and Power.” But with reference to the sight of the Form mentioned in verse 45, the question of divine sight did not arise. Anyone possessing single-minded

devotion can see that Form. This proves that the praises uttered in verses 52 and 54 were not of the Cosmic Form.

If it is argued that though these words of praise were not uttered with reference to the Cosmic Form, the Form of the Lord mentioned here means the four-armed human form, then this also does not appear to be tenable. For verse 52 says, "Even the gods are always eager to see this form of Mine which you have seen." Why should the gods be eager to see the four-armed human Form? When this could be seen even by men, where was the difficulty for the gods to see it? If it is argued that the gods are eager to see the Cosmic Form, this also does not appear to be proper. For why should the gods be eager to see the terrible sight of the heroes on both sides entering the mouth and being crushed between the teeth of the Lord. All this proves that the words of praise uttered for the second time in the eleventh chapter were uttered with reference to the four-armed Divine Form of the Lord. The words of Arjuna when he describes this Form as with "mace and discus in hands" also prove this, for the human form of the Lord was under promise to Duryodhana not to take up arms during the fight, why should Arjuna request Him to appear with mace and other weapons in hand? Sañjaya's description also makes it clear that according to Arjuna's prayer, the Lord first revealed to him the four-armed Divine Form, and then quickly assuming the gentle appearance of a human Form with two arms consoled the frightened Arjuna.

There is no description of Arjuna's state between the revelation of the four-armed Divine Form and the Lord's assuming the human form. When Arjuna described his state by saying, 'O Lord, I have now regained my nature', it was after the Lord assumed the human form. At the time of the vision of the four-armed Divine Form he was perhaps possessed by wonder and ecstasy. But there is no mention of it in the Gītā. That is why in many Sanskrit commentaries on the Gītā, there is no description of the manifestation of the four-armed Divine

Form. But this is clearly indicated in Sañjaya's description. Sañjaya says—

इत्यर्जुनं वासुदेवस्तथोक्त्वा
स्वकं रूपं दर्शयामास भूयः ।
आश्वासयामास च भीतमेनं
भूत्वा पुनः सौम्यवपुर्महात्मा ॥

When rendered into simple Sanskrit prose this verse will read as follows—

वासुदेवः अर्जुनं इति उक्त्वा भूयः तथा स्वकं रूपं दर्शयामास च पुनः महात्मा सौम्यवपुः भूत्वा एनं भीतं आश्वासयामास ।

“Having thus spoken to Arjuna, Vāsudeva again showed him His own four-armed (Divine) Form, and having put on a gentle appearance, the Great Soul Śrī Kṛṣṇa consoled the frightened Arjuna.”

The statement in the first half of the verse that the Lord “again showed him His own Form” proves that when the Lord said in verse 49 “giving up fear and with a pleased mind, see again this My original Form”, that very moment He showed the Divine Form to Arjuna. Then, in the second half of the verse comes the statement of His assuming the gentle human form and consoling Arjuna.

Instead of rendering the verse into simple prose as above, some people treat the word ‘सौम्यवपुः’ as an attributive of ‘स्वकं रूपम्’ but this is an impossible construction, for ‘स्वकं रूपम्’ is in the accusative case, and ‘सौम्यवपुः’ being an attributive of Mahātmā Kṛṣṇa is in the nominative singular. Besides, this construction makes the indeclinable particle ‘भूत्वा’ useless and redundant. Some people twist the construction of the verse and render it into following prose—

महात्मा वासुदेवः अर्जुनं इति उक्त्वा पुनः सौम्यवपुः भूत्वा तथा स्वकं रूपं दर्शयामास च एनं भीतं पुनः आश्वासयामास ।

According to this construction the meaning would be that the Lord first put on a gentle appearance and then revealed

His own Form to Arjuna. But what did the Lord show after assuming His gentle appearance? Arjuna himself must have seen him in that Form when He assumed it. The indeclinable particle 'भूत्वा' has to depend on a verb, and that verb must be 'आश्वासयामास', because of its nearness to it. If instead of this it is joined to the verb in 'स्वकं रूपं दर्शयामास', the construction becomes far-fetched and the meaning confused. The word 'महात्मा' also should not be treated as an attribute of 'वासुदेव', because it is near to 'सौम्यवपुः'. The Paramārthaprapā commentary of the Gītā upholds the interpretation that the Lord first revealed before Arjuna His four-armed Divine Form and then putting on a gentle appearance consoled him.

Now, the question remains that in verses 45 and 46 Arjuna by saying 'तदेव' and 'तेनैव' prayed to the Lord to show him the Form which he had seen before. The words 'तत्' and 'तेन' clearly indicate that the Form whose sight he craved for had been seen by him before. If it is argued that 'तत्' points to the human form of the Lord possessed by Him before the manifestation of the Cosmic Form, it cannot be objected to, but this discussion has proved that Arjuna's prayer was for a sight of the Divine Form and not the human form. Then, the question naturally arises, did Arjuna see that Divine Form before; and if so why did he say in verses 41 and 42 that he had been unaware of the greatness of the Lord? The solution to this question is that Arjuna's words "the Divine Form, with the Crown on head, with the mace and discus, etc., in four hands", etc., gives one an impression that the privilege of a secret sight of the Divine Form had been enjoyed by Arjuna before, that is why he pointed to that form with so many attributes; otherwise it would have been sufficient for him only to say, "show me that Divine Form" without the use of any attribute. I am not aware whether there is mention anywhere in the Mahābhārata, of Arjuna's getting a vision of

the four-armed Divine Form. If there is no such mention, these words of Arjuna should be interpreted to mean that he had this vision of the four-armed Divine Form once in the past. All the facts of the earthly sports of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna have not been recorded in our sacred books, nowhere we find any exhaustive description of their character and activities and this vision of Arjuna was a guarded secret, therefore he gave only a hint by saying 'तदेव' that form only.'

Next, we come to the question of Arjuna's ignorance about the greatness of the Lord. Though verses 41 and 42 give one the impression that Arjuna was unaware of this greatness, as a matter of fact it was not so. Humility is ingrained in the character of a devotee. With reference to the Lord's greatness there are previous expressions of Arjuna in the Gītā, when he said—

परं ब्रह्म परं धाम पवित्रं परमं भवान्।
 पुरुषं शाश्वतं दिव्यमादिदेवमजं विभुम्॥
 आहुस्त्वामृषयः सर्वे देवर्षिर्नारदस्तथा।
 असितो देवलो व्यासः स्वयं चैव ब्रवीषि मे॥

“You are the supreme Brahma, supreme Abode, supreme holiness; all the Ṛṣis speak of You as the eternal divine Puruṣa, the prime Deity, unborn and all-pervading. Likewise speak Devarṣi Nārada, the Ṛṣis Asita and Devala and Maharṣi Vyāsa, and You Yourself also proclaim this to me.”

Again—

कस्माच्च ते न नमेरन् महात्मन्
 गरीयसे ब्रह्मणोऽप्यादिकर्त्रे।
 अनन्त देवेश जगन्निवास
 त्वमक्षरं सदसत्तत्परं यत्॥
 त्वमादिदेवः पुरुषः पुराण-
 स्त्वमस्य विश्वस्य परं निधानम्।
 वेत्तासि वेद्यं च परं च धाम
 त्वया ततं विश्वमनन्तरूप॥

“O Mahātmā, why should they not fall prostrate to You; who are the origin of Brahmā himself and greatest of all? O Infinite, Lord of the gods, Abode of the universe, You are that which is existent (Sat) and non-existent (Asat), and also that which is beyond them, i.e., Brahma itself, the embodiment of Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. You are the Prime Deity, the most ancient Being; You are the supreme reservoir of all that appears; You are both the knower and the knowable, and the highest Abode. It is You who pervade the universe, assuming endless Forms.”

This shows that Arjuna possessed knowledge of the Lord's greatness and was a loving devotee of the Lord. If he lacked this knowledge how could he utter expressions like the above and why should the Lord Himself declare through His own sacred lips “Thou art My devotee and My friend”, and why should He take up the work of driving Arjuna's chariot. In his heart of hearts, Arjuna knew Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa to be God Himself, but overwhelmed with wonder, at the sight of the dreadful Cosmic Form and overtaken by fear, he uttered verses 41 and 42 and craved forgiveness from the Lord. That is why the Lord consoled him by saying, “do not be perturbed and perplexed”, etc., and showing him the Divine Form removed his fear and helped him to regain his nature. If it is held that Arjuna was somewhat deficient in the knowledge of the Lord's greatness and glory, the deficiency must have been wholly removed when he heard the instructions of the Gītā.

All the arguments set forth above conclusively prove that after the revelation of the Cosmic Form, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa appeared before Arjuna in His four-armed Divine Form and after that assuming the gentle two-armed human form consoled and comforted Arjuna.



Penance

There are three types of sin described in the scriptures—(1) bodily, i.e., sin actually committed in deed; (2) vocal, i.e., sin committed through word or speech; (3) mental, i.e., sin committed in intent. In the commission of all these three forms of sin, however, contact of the mind is essential; for there can be no conscious action without the presence of the mind.

Bhagavān Manu has divided bodily sins into three classes—appropriation of unoffered wealth, slaughter without sanction and practice of adultery.¹ Vocal sins, according to him, are four in number—harsh speech, telling a lie, backbiting, idle and irrelevant talk.² And mental sins are—(1) thought about the ways and means of appropriating others' property, (2) thought of injuring another and (3) identification of self with the body, which expresses itself through the false idea that 'I am the body.'³

For the eradication of these three forms of sin, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa has laid down in the Gītā three types of penance, viz., penance of the body, penance of speech and penance of the mind. He has described these three kinds of penance as follows:—

1-अदत्तानामुपादानं हिंसा चैवाविधानतः ।
परदारोपसेवा च शरीरं त्रिविधं स्मृतम् ॥

(Manu. XII. 7)

2-पारुष्यमनृतं चैव पैशुन्यं चापि सर्वशः ।
असम्बद्धप्रलापश्च वाङ्मयं स्याच्चतुर्विधम् ॥

(Manu. XII. 6)

3-परद्रव्येष्वभिध्यानं मनसानिष्टचिन्तनम् ।
वितथाभिनिवेशश्च त्रिविधं कर्म मानसम् ॥

(Manu. XII. 5)

देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञपूजनं शौचमार्जवम् ।
ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते ॥

(XVII. 14)

“Worship of gods, the Brāhmaṇas, the preceptor and the great soul, purity observed in respect of person, conduct and wealth, straightforwardness, continence and harmlessness—these are called penances of the body.”

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत् ।
स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते ॥

(XVII. 15)

“Speech which causes no annoyance to others and is truthful, pleasant and wholesome study of the Vedas and practice of Japa of the Divine Name: these are called penances of speech.”

मनःप्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनमात्मविनिग्रहः ।
भावसंशुद्धिरित्येतत्तपो मानसमुच्यते ॥

(XVII. 16)

“Cheerfulness of mind, gentleness, habit of constant meditation on God, control of mind and purity of the heart: these are called penances of the mind.”

Among bodily sins that of appropriation of unoffered wealth is wiped off by the practice of purity with reference to one's income. That income alone is pure, which is obtained by honest means. He who observes the rule of accepting money which is legitimately his due can never be guilty of the sin of appropriating unoffered wealth. Similarly, the sin of Himsā (violence) is removed by the penance of Ahimsā (non-violence). He who has taken the vow of Ahimsā (non-violence) can never commit an act of Himsā (violence). Likewise, he who has taken the vow of Brahmacharya (continence) can never be guilty of the crime of adultery.

In the same way, he who has taken the vow of uttering only unoffensive and agreeable words will never allow

harsh words to escape his lips. He who has decided to speak what is wholesome will never backbite another. And he who has taken the vows of truthfulness and study of the Vedas or practice of the Divine Name will never utter any lie or indulge in useless and irrelevant talk. For he will always be on his guard lest he may utter any lie even through mistake; but one who indulges in irrelevant and idle talk runs the risk of uttering lies almost at every step. Thus economy of speech is necessary even for observance of truthfulness. He who has no control over his speech, and goes on talking indiscriminately, may be guilty of lying even unconsciously, if not consciously.

The three mental sins, viz., (1) thought of misappropriation of another's property, (2) thought of injuring another, and (3) identification of self with the body, are destroyed by the penance known as practice of purity of the heart.

Practice of penances as stated above has been described by the Lord as the indispensable duty of every man. In the same verse it has also been pointed out that a penance performed by a man of wisdom and intelligence purifies the heart.* Tapas (the Sanskrit equivalent of penance) etymologically means heating by putting something on fire. By the practice of penance the mind, senses and the body are, as if, put on fire and heated; that is why it is called 'Tapas'. Just as the impurities of gold are burnt out when it is heated on fire and the purest ore is thus obtained, even so the impurities of man's heart and senses are destroyed by penance, and he emerges pure by its observance. The Gītā has made three further classifications of penance—Sāttvika, Rājasika and Tāmasika. The Sāttvika form of penance has

* यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यं कार्यमेव तत् ।
यज्ञो दानं तपश्चैव पावनानि मनीषिणाम् ॥

(Gītā XVIII. 5)

been described by it as follows:—

श्रद्धया परया तप्तं तपस्तत्त्रिविधं नरैः ।
अफलाकाङ्क्षिभिर्युक्तैः सात्त्विकं परिचक्षते ॥

(XVII. 17)

“The three forms of penance stated above performed by Yogīs with perfect faith, and without desire for fruit, is called the Sāttvika form of penance.”

The Rājasa form of penance has been defined as below:—

सत्कारमानपूजार्थं तपो दम्भेन चैव यत् ।
क्रियते तदिह प्रोक्तं राजसं चलमध्रुवम् ॥

(XVII. 18)

“The penance which is performed with the object of securing respect, honour and homage or for show alone is uncertain and transient in its effect and is called the Rājasika form of penance.”

The Tāmasika form of penance is as follows:—

मूढग्राहेणात्मनो यत्पीडया क्रियते तपः ।
परस्योत्सादनार्थं वा तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥

(XVII. 19)

“Penance done through perversity with torture to the mind, speech and body with the object of causing injury to another is called Tāmasika penance.”

There is no doubt that the practice of penance through the body, speech and mind, performed with whatever object or motive, will save a man from the commission of new sins, so long and to the extent he is engaged in the practice. But if he is anxious to secure lasting good—in other words, if he seeks God-realization through release from the effects of all good and evil actions of the past and future, he should undertake the practice of the Sāttvika form of penance as stated above. For in the matter of God-realization or release from bondage, it is not so much the quality of the action that counts as the motive by which it is actuated. The action

itself may not possess a very high quality; but if the motive of the doer is high, the fruit of that action will bear a high quality. Reversely, if the action is of a high quality, but the motive behind it is base, the fruit of that action will be base. Occupations which are treated as low and ordinary such as carrying on a trade, business and service, if pursued in a purely disinterested spirit, as a matter of duty, or with the object of attaining God-realization, Divine Love or release from bondage, may bring one the highest fruit; and highest actions such as the performance of sacrifices, practice of charity and penance, if done with a worldly motive, will bring one fruits which are quite insignificant in value. For it is the motive behind an action that determines its fruit. An action performed with a worldly motive such as the possession of a wife, children, wealth, honour, fame and social status will bring these perishable objects. Celestial happiness, though more lasting in comparison with earthly happiness, is nevertheless impermanent and perishable. For when the stock of virtue which takes one to heaven is exhausted, he is hurled down from heaven and sent back to earth (Gītā IX. 21). That is the reason why the Lord has described Rājasika penance performed with the object of securing respect, honour and homage, or merely for show as uncertain and transient in its effect. It has been called uncertain, because there is no certainty that it will bring respect, honour and adoration. One may get this respect and honour from those who hold the practice of penance in high estimation; but those who regard it as of no value, and wholly useless, will show him no respect at all. And it has been called transient in effect because respect, honour and adoration, etc., gained through it, are all impermanent and perishable, they are connected with this world, and one gets them only so long as his actions are worthy of honour and

respect. It is, however, true that like the Tāmasika type of penance, penance of the Rājasika type is not forbidden.

Therefore, those who aspire to attain the highest object should adopt only the Sāttvika form of penance for practice. This penance again, though Sāttvika in form, will be truly Sāttvika in character only if the motive behind it is Sāttvika, that is to say, when it is undertaken not for the satisfaction of any worldly desire. If the motive or object is Rājasika in character, the fruit will correspond to it. The Lord has declared the fruits of Rajas and Tamas to be misery and ignorance (vide Gītā XIV. 17). Therefore, penances of the Rājasika and Tāmasika types should both be rejected by spiritual aspirants.

The Tāmasika form of penance is condemned by its very nature; for it is rooted in ignorance and perversity. And this ignorance and perversity, being an expression of Tamas, take one to the downward course (Gītā XIV. 18). And the penance which is undertaken with the motive of injuring another is palpably harmful, because Himsā (violence) lies at the root of it; therefore suffering in hell should be the inevitable result of that practice.

Those who practise penances of a terrible form, for which there is no sanction in the scriptures, have been described by the Lord as ignorant and possessed of the demoniacal nature. The Lord says:—

अशास्त्रविहितं घोरं तप्यन्ते ये तपो जनाः ।
 दम्भाहङ्कारसंयुक्ताः कामरागबलान्विताः ॥
 कर्शयन्तः शरीरस्थं भूतग्राममचेतसः ।
 मां चैवान्तःशरीरस्थं तान्विद्ध्यासुरनिश्चयान् ॥

(Gītā XVII. 5-6)

“Those who perform terrible austerities according to the whims of their own mind, without the sanction of the scriptures; who are full of hypocrisy, vanity, desires,

attachments and consciousness of strength; who torture the elements forming the body and Me also who dwells within their hearts; know such ignorant people to be possessed of the demoniacal nature.”

Penance for which there is no sanction in the scriptures is no penance in the true sense of the word; it is penance only in the view of men who are possessed of the Tāmasika quality. According to the Lord, those who wilfully take to the practice of penance ignoring the injunctions of the scriptures can neither attain worldly success (power, wealth etc.) nor joy of the Sāttvika type, nor even the supreme state in the form of release from bondage or God-realization.*

Therefore, the scriptures should be our guide in determining what penance should be adopted and what should be rejected. The Lord says :—

तस्माच्छास्त्रं प्रमाणं ते कार्याकार्यव्यवस्थितौ ।
ज्ञात्वा शास्त्रविधानोक्तं कर्म कर्तुमिहार्हसि ॥

(Gītā XVI. 24)

“Therefore, the scriptures should be your authority in determining what should be done and what should not be done. Knowing this, you should perform your duties according to the injunctions of the scriptures.”

This proves that penance also should be taken up when it is sanctioned by the scriptures. It is this type of penance which the Lord has recommended in the Gītā (XVIII. 5) as an indispensable duty. Those who undertake penance for which there is no sanction in the scriptures retard their spiritual evolution.

Through the practice of penance alone man may liberate himself from the clutches of sin and realize God: this has

* यः शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य वर्तते कामकारतः ।
न स सिद्धिमवाप्नोति न सुखं न परां गतिम् ॥

(Gītā XVI. 28)

been declared by the Lord in the fourth chapter of the Gītā. This will be made clear through a joint study of verses 28 and 31 of the same chapter. In verse 28 the Lord has described penance as a form of sacrifice, and in verse 31 He has pointed out realization of Eternal Brahma as the fruit gained by those who partake of nectar in the form of the remains of sacrifice. The word 'Yajña' (sacrifice) in verse 31 covers all forms of spiritual practice undertaken for God-realization, and when through the pursuit of such practices the heart of the Sādhaka is purified, he attains spiritual delight in the form of transparency and tranquillity of mind (Gītā II. 64-65; XVIII. 36-37); this should be understood as the nectar in the form of the remains of sacrifice. Partaking of the nectar means to remain merged in that pure, spiritual delight, and the partaker of that nectar being liberated from sins attains Eternal Brahma. This is the purport of what the Lord has declared in the above verse.

Now, when it is established that through the practice of penance alone as a form of sacrifice man may realize God through liberation from sins, the question naturally arises whether all men are qualified to take up this sacrifice, or whether the eligibility is confined to any particular class or any particular Āśrama. The answer to this question is that men belonging to all classes and all Āśramas are qualified to take up the practice of the three forms of penance—bodily, vocal and mental—as described in the Gītā. Only the form of penance is altered in certain respects according to the qualification of the Sādhaka. For instance, practice of Brahmacharya as a form of bodily penance will take one form in the case of a householder, and another form in the case of men belonging to the other three Āśramas. Association with women has been strictly forbidden for members of the Brahmacharya, Vānaprastha and Samnyāsa orders; therefore

in their case Brahmacharya means renunciation of all the eight forms of sexual indulgence. But in the case of the householder, who has been enjoined to go to his wife during the period favourable to conception with a view to get a son and thereby obtain release from the debt of the Pitṛs, it is no infringement of Brahmacharya if he indulges in sex for two nights avoiding the six prohibited and eight other nights out of the sixteen counted from the appearance of the menstrual flow. Bhagavān Manu says:—

निन्द्यास्वष्टासु चान्यासु स्त्रियो रात्रिषु वर्जयन्।
ब्रह्मचार्येव भवति यत्र तत्राश्रमे वसन्॥

(Manu. III. 50)

“He who avoids the six prohibited nights and eight other nights for sexual connection is a Brahmachārī, to whatever Āśrama he may belong.”

The Law-giver Manu describes the six prohibited nights as follows:—

तासामाद्याश्चतस्रस्तु निन्दितैकादशी च या।
त्रयोदशी च शेषास्तु प्रशस्ता दश रात्रयः॥

(Manu. III. 47)

“Out of the sixteen nights favourable to conception the first four and the eleventh and thirteenth nights are prohibited; the remaining ten nights are auspicious.”

Out of these ten, again, he who desires a son should avoid the four uneven nights, viz., the fifth, seventh, ninth and fifteenth; for Manu says:—

युग्मासु पुत्रा जायन्ते स्त्रियोऽयुग्मासु रात्रिषु।
तस्माद्युग्मासु पुत्रार्थी संविशेदार्तवे स्त्रियम्॥

(Manu. III. 48)

“Connection with the wife during the sixth, eighth, tenth, twelfth, fourteenth and sixteenth nights of her menses will produce a son, and connection during uneven nights will produce a daughter. Therefore, he who desires a son

should go to his wife only during the even nights of her menses."

Thus ten out of the sixteen nights, viz., the six prohibited and four uneven ones, are left out of consideration for those who desire a son. Out of the six remaining even nights, again, there is an injunction to avoid the Parva days, that is, the days of the four changes of the moon:—‘पर्ववर्जं व्रजेच्चैनाम्’ (Manu). These Parva days are four, viz., the eighth and fourteenth day of each half month, and the days of the full and new moon. Similarly, consecrated days like the Ekādaśī (eleventh day of the lunar fortnight), Saṅkrānti (the sun’s passage from one zodiacal sign into another), etc., have to be avoided. Some of these days will synchronize with the ten prohibited days already mentioned. Thus in the course of the month there will remain barely two days when it is permissible for a householder to meet his wife with sexual intent. That is why Bhagavān Manu has declared one who avoids fourteen nights during the menses of the wife to be a Brahmachārī. The scriptures highly praise those who indulge in sex only once in the course of a month.

Similarly, a righteous war in which one gets involved without his seeking it is declared to be Dharma in the case of a Kṣatriya. Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself says in the Gītā:—

स्वधर्ममपि चावेक्ष्य न विकम्पितुमर्हसि ।
धर्म्याद्धि युद्धाच्छ्रेयोऽन्यत्क्षत्रियस्य न विद्यते ॥

(II. 31)

“You should not waver considering your own duty; for there is nothing more auspicious for a Kṣatriya than a righteous war.”

Now, in a war Himsā (violence) is inevitable. This

unavoidable Himśā for a Kṣatriya in a righteous war will be treated as part of Ahimśā (non-violence), and it will cause him no sin. That is why Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:—

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्।
स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम्॥

(Gītā XVIII. 47)

“One’s own Dharma, though destitute of merits, is better than the well-executed Dharma of another. He who does the duty imposed on him by his own Dharma, incurs no sin.”

Not only this, the Lord even goes so far as to say that one should not abandon one’s duty which falls to his lot naturally by virtue of his birth in a particular class of society; for just as fire is associated with smoke, even so every work, however high and Sāttvika in nature it may be, is tainted by some evil.* Therefore, an act of Himśā (violence) unavoidably done by a Kṣatriya engaged in a righteous war in which he finds himself involved without his seeking it is, in fact, a form of Ahimśā (non-violence).

Among penances of speech, ‘Swādhyāya’ in the case of a Śūdra should be interpreted to mean Japa of the Divine Name; for there is no sanction in the scriptures for a Śūdra to study the Vedas. For the twice-born classes, it means both study of the Vedas and Japa of the Divine Name. It should not lead one to imagine that the scriptures have done an injustice to the Śūdras by denying them the right to study the Vedas. The object which is gained by the twice-born classes by the practice of both Japa of the Divine Name and study of the Vedas, may be gained by the Śūdra by practice of Japa of the Divine Name alone. With regard to God-realization, all are considered to possess an equal right.

* सहजं कर्म कौन्तेय सदोषमपि न त्यजेत्।
सर्वारम्भा हि दोषेण धूमेनाग्निरिवावृताः ॥

(XVIII. 48)

Penances of the mind may be practised by men belonging to all classes and all Āśramas, and they are both superior to and more difficult than penances of the body and speech. He whose mind has been brought under control and has attained purity and tranquillity through the observance of mental penance will naturally and automatically perform penances of the body and speech; for evils committed through act and word proceed from some evil intent which has its root in the mind. Therefore, it is the duty of all spiritual aspirants to practise all the three forms of penance as laid down in the Gītā disinterestedly, and with full faith and devotion.



Karmayoga in the Bhagavadgītā

Is 'Niskāma Karmayoga' as preached in the 'Bhagavadgītā' attended with Devotion or is it divorced from it? If it is accompanied by Devotion, what is its exact nature?

While considering this question, it appears necessary to devote some thought at the outset to the different forms of action. Actions are of various description and can be mainly divided into three classes, viz., (1) those that are forbidden, (2) those which are prompted by some desire, and (3) those that have been enjoined upon us as obligatory.

Thieving, adultery, doing injury to others, lying, duplicity, chicanery, violence, partaking of forbidden food and error are what they call forbidden acts (निषिद्ध कर्म).

Actions which are performed with the object of securing a wife, children, riches and so on or getting rid of an ailment or calamity are known as काम्य कर्म (actions which are prompted by some desire).

Devotion to God, adoration of deities, performing sacrifices, alms-giving, practising austerity, serving one's parents and elders, discharging the obligations attaching to one's caste and order and supplying bodily wants such as hunger, thirst and so on are called obligatory actions (कर्तव्य कर्म).

Even actions which are of an obligatory nature can be treated as 'Kāmya Karma' when they are accompanied by some desire. But they also include obligations natural to one's caste and order as well as one's vocational duties. Hence it is all the more incumbent on a man to discharge those duties. It is, on the other hand, optional for everyone to perform or not to perform actions of the 'Kāmya' type

which have been prescribed in the Śāstras, with some particular end in view.

Of these three varieties of actions those that are forbidden should, of course, be avoided by all. Actions of the 'Kāmya' type, on the other hand, are not at all necessary for those who seek liberation whereas those of the third class, viz., obligatory actions are both attended with desire and divorced from it according to one's mental outlook. From the moment one desires to engage in an action of the 'Kāmya' type and long after the completion of that work, the mind continues solely to think of the fruit of that action. The mind of one who performs such actions continues at every step to refer to its object, the fruit of that action. If the action is performed with the object of acquiring riches, the man is reminded of it at every moment. Nay, his mind is completely absorbed in the thought of riches. The attainment of his object, viz., the acquisition of wealth fills him with delight, whereas the frustration of his purpose, viz., non-acquisition of wealth or any other impediment in his way afflicts him much. His mind, engrossed as it is with the thought of the fruit of his action, is almost always worried and restless. The mind of such a person, enamoured as it is of worldly objects, can even prompt him sometimes to engage in forbidden acts. Although a man who performs actions in conformity with the injunctions of the Śāstras for the fulfilment of some desire, does not want to indulge in forbidden acts, still on account of his craving for worldly objects there is always the risk of his falling down. In case there is some mistake in the performance of an action, the doer, far from attaining his object, has to reap its evil consequences in the shape of some trouble or becomes liable to expiation. The state of mind of one who practises 'Karmayoga' is entirely different from that of an interested

agent. His mind is not obsessed by any worldly desire. Whatever he does, he does in a spirit of detachment, relinquishing all desire for its fruit. Here one may ask: if he has no desire for fruit, why does he perform any action at all? The average man cannot perform an action without any motive and the motive is always supplied by an end. Such being the case, an action cannot be performed without a desire for its fruit. We agree. The average man must have some motive in engaging in activity of any kind; but the motive is of various kinds. An interested agent performs various actions with a view to attaining different ends. Covetousness for some worldly pleasure supplies the motive for his actions. That is why his actions are marked by attachment, his intellect is clouded by ambitions (vide 'Gītā' II. 42-44; IX. 20-21). It is for this very reason that he feels delighted in success and dejected in failure, whereas realization of God is the only motive left for the actions of those who perform them in a disinterested way.* Hence he engages in actions with ever new vigour and zeal. He is free from attachment inasmuch as he has no worldly object in view. He does not feel joy or sorrow when he meets with success or failure, as his ideal has become very lofty. He pays no heed to the outward consequences of his actions. To him all the objects of the world appear much too worthless, foul and trivial as compared with God. In order to realize the noble ambition of attaining God, who is the Greatest of the Great, he brushes aside the biggest objects of the world as of little consequence (vide 'Gītā' II. 49).

That is why he does not feel joy and sorrow in the

* The desire entertained by a 'Karmayogī' (disinterested agent), namely, that to realize God is not regarded as a desire, leading as it does ultimately to the highest bliss. One who is desirous of attaining God is regarded as a disinterested agent.

acquisition and otherwise of worldly objects. There is no possibility of his performing forbidden acts as with an interested agent. Forbidden acts are attributable either to attachment or to avarice. A disinterested agent, however, seeks to remain detached from all worldly objects, giving up all craving for the same. He considers God as the only object worth coveting. His mind clings to Him and Him alone. He, therefore, performs all those actions which are helpful to His realization, with a great zeal. It is an admitted fact that only those actions which have been enjoined upon us by God, which have been prescribed in the Śāstras, and which are in no way prejudicial to anyone, can be helpful in attaining God. Such actions cannot in any case include forbidden acts. Thus a disinterested agent is quite unlike an interested agent.

An interested person regards worldly objects as attractive, gratifying and agreeable, and performs actions out of attachment and with a view to attaining those objects, feeling pleasure in success and sorrow in failure. A disinterested person, on the other hand, looks upon everything as belonging to God, and, keeping his mind equipoised in success and failure and relinquishing attachment and desire for fruit, performs all sorts of actions in obedience to His commands and for His sake alone. This constitutes the difference in the outlook of an interested agent, on the one hand, and a disinterested agent, on the other.

The topic of disinterested action is introduced in the 'Gītā' in verse 39 of Chapter 2. After having discussed 'Sāṅkhyayoga' in verses 11 to 30, the Lord, while inciting Arjuna to behave like a Kṣatriya, proceeds to advise him as follows:-

सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ ।
ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥

(Gītā II. 37)

Having expounded to Arjuna (who was in his infatuation afraid of incurring sin) the Sāṅkhya doctrine that by keeping himself equipoised in the various forms of success and failure such as pleasure and pain, triumph and defeat, gain and loss, he would incur no sin, the Lord commences the exposition of 'Karmayoga' in the very next verse which runs as under:-

एषा तेऽभिहिता साङ्ख्ये बुद्धिर्योगे त्विमां शृणु।

बुद्ध्या युक्तो यया पार्थ कर्मबन्धं प्रहास्यसि॥

(Gītā II. 39)

“So far have I presented to you, O Pārtha (son of Prthā) the Sāṅkhya point of view. Now I proceed to lay before you the viewpoint of the Yogīs. Having armed yourself with this attitude of mind, you will be able to shake off completely the shackles of action.”

In the next verse the Lord goes on to eulogise 'Karmayoga' and observes that a tithe of this discipline averts serious consequences. Later on, in verse 47 He points out that though it is incumbent on us to perform actions we are helpless in regard to its fruit. In verse 48 He says that equanimity (समत्व) consists in maintaining an attitude of indifference in regard to the completion or otherwise of whatever action one performs, and also in regard to its consequences. So saying, He exhorts Arjuna to give up attachment and to perform actions with a mind equipoised in success and failure, and proceeds to tell him that the object to be gained by this behaviour is to get liberated from the shackles (of birth and death) and to attain the highest goal which is free from all sorrow and which is imperishable, viz., God (vide 'Gītā' II. 51).

Thus in verses 47 to 51 of Chapter 2, the Lord has discussed 'Karmayoga'. Although the word 'Bhakti' has nowhere been expressly mentioned in the above

dissertation, this should not, however, be taken to mean that this type of 'Karmayoga' is divorced from devotion. Of course, in some places the idea of 'Bhakti' has been clearly and prominently brought out, while in others it has been expressed indirectly and given a secondary place. The existence of God and the noble idea of attaining Him have been referred to in a general way in every exposition of 'Karmayoga'. In fact, the practice of disinterested action begins only when the aspirant seeks to relinquish attachment to fruit, with the auspicious and strong determination to realize God, and gives up all notions of joy and sorrow in the acquisition and otherwise of worldly objects.

Such actions as do not have the pleasure or realization of God as their end do not come under the category of 'Karmayoga'. 'Karmayoga' is accomplished only when the actions are connected with God. Of course, the method of exposition of 'Karmayoga' is twofold in the 'Bhagavadgītā'. In some verses 'Bhakti' is clearly mentioned as a predominant feature, while in others it is not explicitly mentioned.

The passages in which 'Bhakti' has been referred to as a predominant feature are marked by the following expressions.

'Surrendering to Me' (मयि संन्यस्य); 'Depositing with God' (ब्रह्मण्याधाय); 'Discharge your duties (fight) while thinking of Me' (मामनुस्मर युध्य च); 'Dedicate everything to Me' (तत्कुरुष्व मदर्पणम्); 'Be intent on My service' (मत्कर्मपरमो भव); 'Worshipping Him through one's own actions' (स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य); 'Performing all actions under My aegis' (कुर्वाणो मद्व्यपाश्रयः); 'Intent on Me' (मत्परः)—vide 'Gītā' III. 30; V. 10; VIII. 7; IX. 27. Where the idea of 'Bhakti' has been expressed indirectly and in a general way, such expressions do not occur (vide 'Gītā' II. 47-51; III. 7, 19; IV. 14; VI. 1; XVIII. 6, 9).

From the above it is clear that both the expositions contain a reference to God. And, accordingly, one can attain God even by moulding one's conduct according to the verses in which expressions mentioning the name of the Lord or signifying the idea of भगवत्-शरण (dedication to Him), and भगवदर्थ कर्म (actions having God as their object) have not been used. For, even in such cases the object in view, is nothing else but the realization of God. No doubt the realization of God is quickened by supplementing 'Karmayoga' with such items of devotion as remembering (स्मरण) and reciting the name (कीर्तन) of God. Of all Karmayogīs it is such Yogīs that are regarded as the best.

The Lord says:-

“Among all Karmayogīs he who devoutly betakes himself to Me with the inner self intent on Me, is considered by Me to be the most completely harmonized.”

Those who do not in this way combine 'Bhakti' with 'Karmayoga' also attain God, though after a long time (vide 'Gītā' IV. 38; VI. 45). 'Karmayoga' has been preached in the 'Bhagavadgītā' under several names such as समत्वयोग (the Path of Equanimity), बुद्धियोग (the Path of Mental Equilibrium), कर्मयोग (the Path of Action), तदर्थ कर्म (Action for His sake), मदर्थ कर्म (Action for My sake), मत्कर्म (My Business), मदर्पण (Work dedicated to Me), सात्त्विक त्याग (relinquishment of a nobler type), etc. Though the goal to be reached by practising all these types of 'Karmayoga' is the same, there is difference in the practice of each. For instance, the difference between मदर्पण and मदर्थ is indicated below:-

मदर्पण and भगवदर्पण mean the same thing; while मदर्थ, तदर्थ and भगवदर्थ are synonymous terms. Of these मदर्पण कर्म can be illustrated by the following example. A man collects money for a particular object and has already got some money with

him. He can, however, alter the object of his collecting money whenever he likes and can divert the amount that he has collected to some other use. Thus in मदर्पण कर्म a particular action can be dedicated (to God) at an interim stage or after completion, even though it may have been commenced and continued with a different motive. That prince among devotees, the celebrated Dhruva, commenced his austerities for the sake of acquiring his father's kingdom. His idea, however, changed in the meantime and his penance was dedicated to the Lord, the result of which was attainment of God. Nay, he was at the same time able to acquire sovereignty according to his previous ambition. But the material gain which fell to his lot did not interfere with his spiritual progress as it does in the case of ordinary people. That was the outcome of his dedicating his action to the Lord. Thus an action which, though commenced with a different motive, is subsequently or eventually dedicated to the Lord, is treated as an offering to the Lord.

That is not the case with मदर्थ or भगवदर्थ कर्म, which is performed from the very beginning for the sake of the Lord. Just as the work of preparing an oblation for some deity or collecting victuals for feeding the Brāhmaṇas proceeds from the very beginning, with some definite object, similarly, every action of an aspirant who works for the sake of the Lord is commenced with that motive and that motive alone. No doubt, भगवदर्थ कर्म is of various types such as that which is performed with the object of attaining God, that which is done as a behest from God, that which is performed as His service, and that which is done merely to please Him.

So far we have dealt with the type of 'Karmayoga' in which 'Bhakti' is predominant. Besides these, the verses in which different words such as समत्वयोग, कर्मयोग, सात्त्विक त्याग,

have been used, in fact, denote the same thing. What has been dealt with in verses 47 to 51 of Chapter II under the name of 'Karmayoga' and so on has been reiterated in verses 6 and 9 of Chapter XVIII under the name of त्याग. As a matter of fact, relinquishment of fruit and attachment is present in both. 'Niṣkāma Karmayoga' has been propounded both with 'Bhakti' and 'Karma' as predominant, which proves that 'Niṣkāma Karmayoga' is that Karma which is performed with the object of attaining God.

It is not necessary for one who practises 'Niṣkāma Karmayoga' to shirk one's obligations and to practise devotion, meditation, etc., in seclusion (with the object of attaining God). Of course, there is no objection if anyone does so. It is always highly commendable to remember and fix one's mind upon God. But anyone who does not resort to this in seclusion may reach the highest goal by constantly discharging one's duties as laid down in the Śāstras with his mind intent on God, through dedication to Him and through His Grace. The Lord says:-

"Though performing all actions, he attains through My Grace the eternal and indestructible abode, having taken refuge in Me."

"Having mentally dedicated all actions unto Me and intent on Me, resort to 'Karmayoga', which is characterised by equanimity of mind, and always think of Me."

(Gītā XVIII. 56-57)

As a matter of fact, it is not actions which bind a man; it is desire for fruit and attachment which do so. If the latter are absent, no action, whatsoever can bind a man. The Lord has clearly stated that he who leads an active life according to the rules prescribed for his caste, attains perfection. Of course, he must have God as his goal while performing the actions.

यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम्।
स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥

(Gītā XVIII. 46)

“A man attains perfection by worshipping through his actions Him from Whom all beings emanate and by Whom all this (universe) is pervaded.”

Just as a (devoted) wife looks upon her husband as her all-in-all, and duly performs all the household work assigned to her, with her mind, speech and body, as a behest from her husband and for his sake, always thinking of him, and thereby wins his pleasure; in the same way one who practises ‘Niṣkāma Karmayoga’ regards God as his all-in-all and discharges his duties with mind, speech and body, as a behest from God and for His sake, always thinking of Him, and thereby wins not only His pleasure but Himself besides.

A devotee who follows the path of disinterested action worships the Lord through his actions, regarding Him as pervading the whole creation, animate as well as inanimate, and looking upon everything as God Himself. For winning the pleasure of an emperor it is not essential that every employee of his should perform one and the same kind of work, that everyone should work as his premier or commander-in-chief. Everyone should endeavour to please His Majesty with the work that has been entrusted to Him according to his own capacity. He should do his job efficiently for the sake of his Master’s pleasure, minding not the work allotted to others which may be much superior to his own. A menial servant who sweeps the apartments of the Royal Mansions and gets a very low pay can please his master by his obedience and looking after the tidiness of rooms, as much as an erudite scholar attached to the court

by reciting the Vedas. No one need abandon the duties that have fallen to one's lot. What is necessary is to dedicate one's actions to God in a disinterested way merely to please Him. This is how we can worship God through our actions and thereby attain Him. The sole goal of a 'Niṣkāma Karmayogī' is God. Every effort of an avaricious man is directed towards obtaining money; he is always obsessed by the idea of acquiring riches by any means, and is not inclined even to hazard a step which may involve some expenditure to him or which may not fetch him money or may interfere in anyway with his income. He undertakes only such actions as are helpful to his acquiring money. Similarly, a 'Niṣkāma Karmayogī' undertakes only such actions all the day long, with his mind, speech and body, as are agreeable to God; he never indulges in forbidden acts such as thieving, adultery, lying, duplicity, taking intoxicating drugs and partaking of prohibited food, and idle errors which waste his time, all these being a hindrance in the attainment of God. Far from doing such acts, he does not even like such actions. He is always engaged in thinking of, and performing, those actions only which are helpful to the attainment of his ultimate goal, viz., God. He never looks at others' agreeable and honourable occupations with a wistful eye. He continues to perform his duties silently and as a matter of course. He never stops to see whether a particular action is inferior or superior; for he knows that it is not the outward form of an action which is instrumental in leading one to God-realization: it is the attitude of one's mind that is responsible for it. The attitude of one's mind is responsible for one's uplift or downfall. That is why he does not seek in blind imitation of others to undertake a work which is not prescribed for him, however superior it

may be. He does not feel that his work is defective in anyway or that others work is altogether free from blemish. He believes that his own work, though destitute of merits, is better and more commendable than others' work, which may be much superior and endowed with merits. One who performs one's duty does not incur sin (vide 'Gītā' XVIII. 47). People are engaged in the vain pursuit of bringing everyone to the same level in society, as they have not grasped the meaning of this Nişkāma Karmayoga. The Lord has said:-

सहजं कर्म कौन्तेय सदोषमपि न त्यजेत्।
सर्वारम्भा हि दोषेण धूमेनाग्निरिवावृताः ॥

(Gītā XVIII. 48)

“One should not abandon one's duty which is congenital, though defective. All undertakings, indeed, are tainted with some blemish, just as fire is clouded by smoke.”

The occupation natural to a particular caste in which a man is born constitutes his own duty. The well-organised caste system prevailing in India is the highest conception of this division of labour. Those who seek to abolish this system commit a great blunder. Disparity can never be eliminated in this world. Of course, disruption in society can be easily brought about, which is all the more harmful. A man is, ordinarily speaking, naturally inclined and eager to perform actions which are suited to the class or community in which he is born, the parents whose blood is running through his veins, and the atmosphere in which he is bred from the time of his birth till the time he begins to understand his duties. Hence that leaning or bias is regarded as his habit or predilection. And those actions which are prescribed in the Śāstras and are suited to his nature or temperament have been termed as स्वधर्म (one's own duty),

सहजकर्म (congenital duties), स्वकर्म (one's own actions), नियतकर्म (prescribed actions), स्वभावजकर्म (natural duties) and स्वभावनियतकर्म (actions determined by one's temperament), etc. If an aspirant is born in a society well-organised according to the caste system, it is easy for him to know his natural or congenital duty. If not, he should determine his duty according to his temperament on the basis of the above-mentioned factors.

So, a man should perform his duty according to his vocation, without attachment or any selfish motive and in a spirit of service of all, regarding God as pervading the whole world.

For instance, there is a Vaiśya who carries on business transactions, which constitute his duty. But that duty of his can attain the rank of 'Niṣkāma Karmayoga' only when it is performed with the pure motive of serving God and not with any selfish motive. It is not necessary to give up trade and retire to the jungle: what is necessary is to change one's mental outlook, to free it from the tinge of selfishness and desire. As soon as the thought of worldly gain quits our mind, yielding place to God, the actions which have heretofore been a cause of bondage become instrumental in the attainment of God.

Mercury and arsenic can prove nectar-like, if they are refined and purified by an expert physician. The very mercury or arsenic a dose of which can bring about one's death is transformed into ambrosia when its poisonous element has been taken away. Similarly, actions are a source of bondage or death only so long as they are attended with some selfish motive or attachment. As soon as they are purified by being divorced from selfishness and attachment, they become nectar-like and instrumental in

enabling a man to attain the immortal seat of God. That is why it is not necessary to relinquish any duty: what is necessary is to purify the mind. A man, for instance, performs sacrifices, gives alms and practises austerities with a selfish motive; whereas another performs the duty attaching to his caste, viz., imparting knowledge, warfare, trade or service, although he does so with the belief that God is present everywhere and with the sacred motive of gratifying and serving others. The latter is superior to the man who merely performs sacrifices, gives alms and practises austerities. For, since he has no desire, he remains equipoised in success and failure; and, since he is always thinking of God and His behests, avarice and attachment cannot even cross his shadow. Avarice and attachment being absent, there is no possibility of sins or forbidden acts being committed by him.

We do not mean here that one should not perform sacrifices, give alms or practise austerities, or that they are trivial as a means of attaining God. They are always commendable and are very helpful in purifying one's heart and leading to God-realization; but they are so when they are resorted to in a disinterested way. Hence whatever has been written above is merely to indicate the true worth of 'Karmayoga.'

The above dissertation has proved that a Karmayogī is incapable of committing sins knowingly. If, however, a sin is ever committed by him through inadvertence, habit, ignorance or mistake, he is not held guilty for it, inasmuch as there is no selfish motive behind it. Performance of disinterested action cannot bind a man (vide 'Gītā' IV. 14; V. 10). On the other hand, every action of his being dedicated to the Lord, he becomes fully eligible for Divine Grace.


A king has a number of employees. Everyone gets his

emoluments according to his qualifications, and everyone is responsible for some work relating to the King. But every salaried servant is governed by State Rules. If an employee violates a rule even through inadvertence or ignorance, he has to undergo punishment according to rules. But one who never and in no way achieves any of his selfish ends through the king or his government and serves the king simply out of disinterested devotion, the king is simply enamoured of his selfless services. If at anytime he commits a flaw or error, a good king is not displeased with him. He knows that the man is a selfless servant of the State. If such a servant pleads guilty and courts punishment, the king says, "Well, my friend, we are already indebted to you for your services. What punishment can we mete out to you for your solitary remissness?" Nay, the king feels indebted to him for his services and seeks to do him good in everyway. Similarly, if one who is a selfless servant of God, who dedicates every action to His feet simply for His pleasure, commits an error, God, who is our natural friend, does not at all mind it. This does not, however, constitute a violation of rules; a disinterested servant is governed by such rules.

Thus performing his duty for the sake of attaining God, the aspirant eventually succeeds in his efforts; but even he who has attained God in this way and become liberated during his life-time is capable of performing actions, as long as he lives, for instructing the world like Janaka (vide 'Gītā' III. 20). Although nothing remains to be done by him (vide 'Gītā' III. 17), there is no reason for him either to relinquish actions so long as his mind and senses are alert. One who has attained perfection through "Karmayoga" and become liberated during his life-time is quite unlike ordinary people (vide 'Gītā' II. 55-58; XII.13,19).

The actions of such a personage who has attained God are only meant for the guidance of the world, according to verse 25 of chapter III. of Gītā. And, though actually performed, they are not recognised as actions, devoid as they are of desire and purpose (vide 'Gītā' IV. 19-20).

Thus one who practises Karmayoga dedicated his actions to God for attaining Him and attains Him in the end through His grace. An action which is invariably and indissolubly connected with God can never be divorced from devotion. Hence the Karmayoga preached in the Gītā is accompanied by devotion, and it consists in performing duties prescribed by the Śāstras with an equipoised mind and simply for the sake of God and as a behest from Him, giving up desire for its fruit and attachment thereto.



Loka-Saṅgraha

Let us bestow some thought on the meaning of Loka-Saṅgraha. Many learned expositors of the Gītā have understood 'Loka-Saṅgraha' in the sense of weaning the people from the evil course and urging them to their own prescribed duty. According to other commentators Loka-Saṅgraha consists in deterring men from lapsing into evil ways. Some commentators, again, have understood it to mean maintenance of the world order or defending the faith of the people. The late Lokamānya B. G. Tilaka has explained the term in his 'Gītā-Rahasya' as follows:- "Loka-Saṅgraha consists in binding men together and protecting, maintaining and regulating them in such a way that they might acquire that strength which results from mutual co-operation, thereby putting them on the path of acquiring blessedness while maintaining their good condition." Etymologically speaking, 'Loka' means mankind and 'Saṅgraha' denotes bringing them closer together or consolidating them. The idea is that due to diversity of thought people are getting disintegrated and wandering here and there in quest of happiness, but real happiness eludes their grasp. Hence it is the duty of exalted souls who have the welfare of the people at heart to divert the mind of extroverts from all sides and focus it on God. As a matter of fact all the actions of exalted souls who have attained perfection as also of God are as a matter of course directed towards Loka-Saṅgraha; it is such altruistic actions of theirs that serve as a model for strivers to imitate. Hence strivers too can with a view to their spiritual weal practise Loka-Saṅgraha in a disinterested spirit as a spiritual discipline. Strivers would do well to forswear evil deeds

themselves and take to noble pursuits enjoined by the scriptures in a disinterested spirit with an eye to the attainment of blessedness; for he alone who performs noble deeds himself can direct others to do so.

The purport of the Lord's exhortation in Gītā is that the responsibility for the maintenance and protection of all living beings rests on man. Therefore Loka-Saṅgraha consists in efficiently discharging one's own obligatory duties in a disinterested spirit in consonance with one's own grade in society, stage in life, temperament and circumstances and thereby weaning others by one's own noble example from vices and immoral conduct and urging them to their own duty in the form of virtues and right conduct-and thus helping and maintaining the world process without hindering it in anyway. Giving up the feeling of meum, attachment and interested motives many men have realized God through the Path of Action to this day. Hence a seeker of blessedness should act in a detached spirit not only with a view to God-realization but even with an eye to Loka-Saṅgraha, arguing to himself thus:-"If I fail to do my duties enjoined by the Śāstras, others too will relinquish their duty following me as their pattern, so that a chaos will ensue in the world order and everything will get topsyturvy. Hence with a view to maintaining the world order I ought to perform my obligatory duty."

Nay, later on the Lord further tells Arjuna that he who popularizes among His devotees in a disinterested spirit with an eye to their welfare the text as well as the meaning and ideas of the Gītā, taught by Him, is sure to attain to Him as a reward:-

य इमं परमं गुह्यं मद्भक्तेष्वभिधास्यति ।
भक्तिं मयि परां कृत्वा मामेवैष्यत्यसंशयः ॥

“He who, offering the highest love to Me and free from doubt, preaches the most profound gospel of the Gītā among My devotees shall come to Me alone.”

The idea is that he who puts men wandering in the wilderness of metempsychosis on the path of God-realization by popularizing as aforesaid the ideas of the Gītā for the good of the world is sure to realize God. Thus it is proved that even a striver can perform actions with an eye to Loka-Saṅgraha by way of spiritual endeavour.

Although the Lord says in the Gītā that an exalted soul who has attained perfection through spiritual enlightenment no longer has any obligation:—

यस्त्वात्मरतिरेव स्यादात्मतृप्तश्च मानवः ।
आत्मन्येव च सन्तुष्टस्तस्य कार्यं न विद्यते ॥
नैव तस्य कृतेनार्थो नाकृतेनेह कश्चन ।
न चास्य सर्वभूतेषु कश्चिदर्थव्यपाश्रयः ॥

(III. 17-18)

“He, however, who revels in the Self alone and is gratified with the Self, and is contented in the self, has no obligation. In this world that great soul has no use whatsoever for things done nor for things not done; nor has he selfish dependence of any kind on any creature.”

-He nonetheless enjoins such enlightened and exalted souls to engage in action with an eye to Loka-Saṅgraha-

सक्ताः कर्मण्यविद्वांसो यथा कुर्वन्ति भारत ।
कुर्याद्विद्वांस्तथासक्तश्चिकीर्षुर्लोकसङ्ग्रहम् ॥

(III. 25)

“Arjuna, as the unwise act with attachment, so should the wise man seeking Loka-Saṅgraha act without attachment.”

This inclination on the part of enlightened noble souls to practise Loka-Saṅgraha is attributed to them only figuratively. When we say in common parlance: “This precipice is inclined to fall” there is really no inclination in

the precipice to fall down; only this is a mode of expressing the truth that the precipice is on the verge of falling. Even so an enlightened noble soul has no inclination whatsoever; it is his spontaneous assiduity in the cause of common good that has been indicated through such expressions.

The Lord has urged enlightened noble souls to activity only in view of the fact that devout men naturally try to mould their actions according to the precepts and example of such enlightened souls.

It is for this very reason that grand-uncle Bhīṣma says to Emperor Yudhiṣṭhira:—

लोकसंग्रहसंयुक्तं विधात्रा विहितं पुरा ।
सूक्ष्मधर्मार्थनियतं सतां चरितमुत्तमम् ॥

(Ibid., Śānti., CCLIX. 26)

“The exemplary conduct of the righteous, which is motivated by considerations of the good of humanity, and which reveals the subtle principles of morality and economy, was declared by the creator at the beginning of creation as a model for all.”

For, the characteristics of perfect Yogīs as described in Gītā VI. 6-9, those of perfect devotees as mentioned in XII. 13-19 and those of a Guṇātīta (one who has transcended the three Guṇas and realized God by treading the path of Knowledge) as described in XIV. 22-25 of the Gītā are naturally found in such God-realized noble souls. By moulding one's conduct according to the aforesaid characteristics one is sure to realize God. Hence a seeker of blessedness would do well to imbibe the traits and follow the example of such God-realized exalted souls.

The exploits of the Lord of course are all supremely sanctifying and of the nature of mere pastimes. When one attains blessedness by following the example even of exalted souls of top rank there can be no doubt about the redemption

of those who emulate the example of the Lord and follow His commandments. And on realizing the excellences, glory, essence and mystery of His Līlās one attains final beatitude through the very sight of these Līlās.

In fact the Lord has no obligations. He is ever sated. He has no desire nor any craving; nevertheless His movements are all directed towards Loka-Saṅgraha, i.e., towards the supreme good of living beings and, having no tinge of self-interest about them, are absolutely motiveless. The Lord says to Arjuna:-

न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।
 नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ॥
 यदि ह्यहं न वर्तेयं जातु कर्मण्यतन्द्रितः ।
 मम वर्त्मानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥
 उत्सीदेयुरिमे लोका न कुर्यां कर्म चेदहम् ।
 सङ्करस्य च कर्ता स्यामुपहन्यामिमाः प्रजाः ॥

(Gītā III. 22—24)

“Arjuna! there is nothing in all the three worlds for Me to do, nor is there anything worth attaining unattained by Me; yet I continue to work. Should I not engage in action scrupulously at anytime, great harm will come to the world; for, Arjuna! men follow My course in all matters. If I cease to act, these worlds will perish; nay, I should prove to be the cause of confusion, and of the destruction of these people.”

Thus it is proved that the Lord, who is supremely compassionate without any motive, enacts all His Līlās only with a view to weaning the Jīvas from evil ways and putting them on the right track. Hence His descent into the world of matter is intended only for Loka-Saṅgraha in the form of driving away unrighteousness and re-establishing virtue on a firm footing. He Himself says:—

अजोऽपि सन्नव्ययात्मा भूतानामीश्वरोऽपि सन् ।
 प्रकृतिं स्वामधिष्ठाय सम्भवाम्यात्ममायया ॥

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत।
 अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम्॥
 परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम्।
 धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे॥

(Gītā IV. 6—8)

“Though birthless and deathless and the Lord of all beings, I manifest Myself through My own Yogamāyā (divine energy), keeping My nature (Prakṛti) under control. Arjuna! whenever righteousness is on the decline, and unrighteousness in the ascendant, then I body Myself forth. For the protection of the virtuous, for the extirpation of evil-doers, and for establishing Dharma (righteousness) on a firm footing, I am born from age to age.”

In Śrīmad Bhāgavata too Brahmā, Śiva and other gods and sages glorify the Lord in the following words:-

बिभर्षि रूपाण्यवबोध आत्मा
 क्षेमाय लोकस्य चराचरस्य।
 सत्त्वोपपन्नानि सुखावहानि
 सतामभद्राणि मुहुः खलानाम्॥

(X. ii. 29)

“Being the Spirit, which is consciousness itself, You repeatedly assume (reveal) for the welfare of the mobile and the immobile creation forms constituted of Sattva (unmixed with Rajas and Tamas), which bring delight to the righteous and are harmful (bring destruction) to the wicked.”

Again, Uddhava speaks of Him as follows:—

न चास्य कर्म वा लोके सदसन्मिश्रयोनिषु।
 क्रीडार्थः सोऽपि साधूनां परित्राणाय कल्पते॥

(X. XLvi. 39)

“No action either can be attributed to Him. Even as such He descends into high, low and mixed species (of life) in the world for the sake of sport with a view to the protection of the virtuous.”

To appear thus on the terrestrial plane and enact His Līlās is what constitutes His birth and deeds. His advent and exploits are divine. He who comes to realize the truth and inwardness of His birth and conduct attains final beatitude. The Lord says:—

जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यमेवं यो वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ।

त्यक्त्वा देहं पुनर्जन्म नैति मामेति सोऽर्जुन ॥

(Gītā IV. 9)

“Arjuna, My birth and activities are divine. He who knows this in reality, is not reborn on leaving his body, but comes to Me.”

What doubt can there be under such circumstances about the redemption of a man who emulates the example of the Lord ?

Realizing the essential character and secret of the doings, of the nature of Loka-Saṅgraha, of strivers, perfect souls and the Lord Himself, we should therefore obey the commandments of the Lord and emulate His example.

Actions performed by the Lord and those who have realized God are unearthly, nay, divine. The inwardness of their actions should be grasped. They have no obligation to discharge nor anything to achieve. The welfare of the world is the sole objective of all their activities. Therefore, a transcendent unearthliness peeps through every action of theirs. In those actions there is neither the sense of doership nor any reference to the self nor attachment or craving either for the action itself or for its reward. Therefore, not only is a man redeemed by emulating these actions but also begins to experience joy and peace in his mind every moment even on grasping the inwardness of such actions. The Lord and God-realized souls do not really perform any action; on the other hand, actions ordained by the Śāstras are performed by them as a matter of course. That is the reason why their

actions have been regarded as ideal. They ought to be emulated as a course of discipline by the striver. About exalted souls who have realized God the Lord says:—

नैव तस्य कृतेनार्थो नाकृतेनेह कश्चन ।
न चास्य सर्वभूतेषु कश्चिदर्थव्यपाश्रयः ॥

(Gītā III. 18)

“In this world that great soul has no use whatsoever for things done nor for things not done; nor has he selfish dependence of any sort on any creature.”

Even though in the eyes of such exalted souls no action in the world is worth undertaking or eschewing, yet, from the standpoint of the good of the world their actions as a rule conform to the injunctions of the scriptures and never run counter to scriptural ordinance. The actions performed by them in accordance with the scriptural ordinance are never prompted by attachment; nay, they are quite natural to them. Again it is not out of repugnance that actions forbidden by the Śāstras are eschewed by them. Such actions are avoided by them as a matter of course (Gītā XVIII. 10). The sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ as well as selfishness being absent in them, all their actions are absolutely stainless, unearthly and worth emulating. Their mind, intellect, senses and body, all get etherealized; hence by their contact inanimate objects like earth and living beings get purified. We read in the scriptures:—

कुलं पवित्रं जननी कृतार्था
वसुंधरा भाग्यवती च तेन ।
विमुक्तिमार्गे सुखसिन्धुमग्नं
लग्नं परे ब्रह्मणि यस्य चेतः ॥

(Skanda., Māhe., Kaum., latter half of LII.

137 and the first half of LII. 138)

“Hallowed is the race of the blessed soul whose mind is focussed on and absorbed in the transcendent Infinite, on

the way to Lasting Freedom, and thereby plunged in an ocean of bliss; his mother stands accomplished of purpose in life; nay, the very earth is blessed through him."

No duty remains to be done by such an exalted soul. The Lord says in the Uttara Gītā:—

ज्ञानामृतेन तृप्तस्य कृतकृत्यस्य योगिनः ।
न चास्ति किञ्चित् कर्तव्यमस्ति चेन्न स तत्त्ववित् ॥

(I. 23)

"Nothing remains to be done by the Yogī who has quaffed the nectar of wisdom to his heart's content, and realized (thus) the object of his life. If any duty yet remains to be done by him, he has not realized the Truth."

Even so nothing remains to be achieved by a God-realized soul; for he has already realized what was worth realizing, viz., God, who is all Truth, all Consciousness and all Bliss, so that all his wants have ceased for good. He has all his desires fulfilled. Desires are entirely absent in him. Therefore, he has no selfish dependence on any living being or any object. Established as he is in the Supreme Spirit, the transcendent Brahma, he has nothing to do even with his body; for he remains ever sated and contented in the Supreme Spirit, who is all Consciousness and absolute Bliss, so that there is nothing obligatory for him nor anything worth achieving. That seeker of blessedness, however, who has not yet attained such a state should perform in a detached spirit duties enjoined by the Śāstras, renouncing the feeling of 'I' and 'Mine'. The Lord says to Arjuna:—

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।
असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः ॥

(Gītā III. 19)

"Therefore, go on efficiently doing your duty without attachment. Doing work without attachment man attains the Supreme."

Therefore, completely shaking off vices and immoral conduct, evil addictions, excessive sleep, languor and actions motivated by desire, he who seeks the redemption of his soul should accumulate the wholesome divine riches in the shape of noble virtues and good conduct mentioned in verses 1-3 of Discourse XVI of Śrīmad Bhagavad-Gītā, nor should he harbour affinity or attachment towards any action performed with the mind, speech or body. God-realization comes as a matter of course to him who always performs duties attaching to his grade in society and stage in life in a detached spirit. And actions continue to be performed for the maintenance of the world order as a matter of course by God-realized souls. Under no circumstance do the Śāstras permit us to neglect our general or special duties enjoined by them with due regard to our grade in society and stage in life. On the other hand the scriptures insist on the striver scrupulously performing them. A God-realized soul of course has no obligation whatsoever; actions enjoined by the scriptures and conducive to the good of the world, nevertheless, continue to be performed by him as by Kings Janaka and Aśwapati and other exalted souls. The Lord says in the Gītā:-

कर्मणैव हि संसिद्धिमास्थिता जनकादयः ।
लोकसङ्ग्रहमेवापि सम्पश्यन्कर्तुमर्हसि ॥

(III. 20)

“It is through action (without attachment) alone that Janaka and other wise men reached perfection. Having an eye to the maintenance of the world order too you should take to action.”

King Janaka was an exalted soul and a man of wisdom of a very high order. Even Śukadeva, son of Vedavyāsa, the foremost of ascetics, sought him and received instructions from him. We read in the Śāntiparva of the

Mahābhārata how Śukadeva once posed a question to his father, Sage Vedavyāsa, on the subject of Liberation. Vedavyāsa asked him to approach Janaka in order to be enlightened on the subject. Śukadeva thereupon proceeded to Mithila. As soon as, on reaching the city gate, he began boldly to enter it, the porters stopped him with a rebuff. Śukadeva stopped where he was. His mind was not the least agitated. One of the porters now felt sorry for his behaviour. He saluted the sage with joined palms and escorted him to the second enclosure surrounding the royal palace. Sitting down at one place Śuka began to meditate upon the true nature of Liberation. Sunshine and shade were alike to him. The king's minister next escorted him to the third enclosure and left him in the pleasance known by the name of Pramadāvana. Fifty most lovely girls, who were finely dressed and richly adorned, then sought his presence. They offered worship to him and entertained him with dainty dishes. After that they took him round Pramadāvana for sight-seeing. At that time they continued to laugh, sing and indulge in various lovely sports. The belles, who could read the mind of others, began to render all kinds of services to Śukadeva. But Śukadeva's mind was absolutely sinless. He had conquered his senses and anger. He was above joy and perturbation of mind. He was free from doubt and was ever intent on the performance of his duty. Washing his hands and feet, he offered worship to the evening twilight at sunset. Then taking his seat on a holy mat he started pondering on the true nature of Liberation once more. During the first quarter of the night he remained absorbed in meditation. He reposed according to his needs during the second and third quarters. He got up nearly an hour before the close of the night and, after answering the calls of nature and taking his bath, got absorbed once more in contemplation of God. The belles remained sitting around him.

King Janaka then sought his presence along with his counsellors. Perceiving him in that state, the king worshipped him with due ceremony. The sage inquired of the king about his welfare. Asked about the purpose of his visit, the sage posed to him questions bearing on Liberation. Giving him a suitable reply, the king concluded in the following words:-“O Brāhmaṇa sage, critical sense has dawned on you, your judgment too is stable and sensuality is entirely absent in you. But none attains God-consciousness without sincere and firm conviction. You make no difference between pleasure and pain. Your mind is free from greed. You have no passion for dancing or vocal music. No affinity for any object of sense is aroused in your mind. A clod of earth, stone and gold are alike to you. Therefore myself as well as other men of wisdom regard you as established in the supreme Path of Liberation, which is free from decay and disease. You are established in that which constitutes the essence of Liberation. Now what more do you seek to know?”

Hearing the words of King Janaka, the pure-minded Śukadeva arrived at an unshakable conclusion and, getting established in the Spirit through the intellect and realizing his own spiritual essence, attained oneness with God, who is supreme Peace and supreme Bliss in one, and, accomplished of his purpose, returned from Mithila (See Mahā., Śānti., CCCXXV—CCCXXVII).

In this anecdote, the punctiliousness of the enlightened and high-souled King Janaka in the matter of performing his sacred duties enjoined by the Śāstras in the shape of hospitality shown to the sage and answering the questions posed to him and so on and the devotion of Śukadeva to his daily round of duties such as answering the calls of nature and bathing and offering worship to the evening twilight

are examples of action performed for maintenance of the world order.

Similarly we are told in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad how six Ṛṣis—Prācīnaśāla, Satyayajña, Indradyumna, Jana, Buḍila and Uddālaka, who maintained a large family and were highly well-versed in Vedic lore, sought the presence of King Aśwapati in order to receive enlightenment. The king showed great honour to them and said, “In my kingdom there is no thief, nor a miser, nor a drinker, nor an adulterer; how, then, could there be a lewd woman? On the other hand all maintain the sacred fire and are learned.* I am going to undertake a sacrificial performance. I shall bestow on you too the same amount of money which I shall confer on the other priests. Be good enough to stay here.” To this the sages replied, “We have come here to know the truth about God, who is worshipped everywhere.” Hearing this the king severally instructed all in spiritual wisdom. Receiving enlightenment they all returned each to his respective place.

The activities of these exalted souls were solely directed towards the good of the world. In the Gītā too the Lord enjoins Arjuna to work for the maintenance of the world order. While such actions aiming at the maintenance of the world order are performed as a matter of course by the enlightened, a striver too can imitate them as a model. Loka-Saṅgraha literally means keeping the people integrated. Loka-Saṅgraha, therefore, consists in turning the people of the world—who, having embraced different faiths, are straying away from God and getting disintegrated towards God, who is all Truth, all Consciousness and all Bliss, weaning

* न मे स्तेनो जनपदे न कदर्यो न मद्यपः । नानाहिताग्निर्नाविद्वान्न स्वैरी स्वैरिणी कुतः ॥

(Chā., V. xi. 5)

them from the evil ways and putting them on the right path in their own interest and encouraging them to perform ideal actions by discharging in a disinterested spirit their own duties enjoined by the Śāstras. For, that path alone is the true path, which is trodden by exalted souls. While replying to a question on the subject asked by the Yakṣa in the Mahābhārata, Emperor Yudhiṣṭhira says:—

तर्कोऽप्रतिष्ठः श्रुतयो विभिन्ना
नैको ऋषिर्यस्य मतं प्रमाणम्।
धर्मस्य तत्त्वं निहितं गुहायां
महाजनो येन गतः स पन्थाः ॥

(Vana., CCCXIII. 117)

“Logic has no firm ground to stand upon; the Śruti texts differ in their tenor; there is no single Ṛṣi whose opinion is authoritative. The secret of Dharma (piety) lies hidden in the cavity of the heart, it is most clandestine. Hence the path trodden by the exalted is the only path.”

Therefore, people seeking redemption walk in the footsteps of exalted souls. The Lord says in the Gītā:—

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः।
स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥

(III. 21)

“For whatever a great man does, that very thing other men also do; whatever standard he sets up, the generality of men follow the same.”

Among lakhs of men scarce one happens to be an exalted soul (Gītā VII. 3). Free from selfishness, attachment, affinity and pride the actions of such exalted souls are sublime and out of the common. Hence they are able to react on others. Seeing the extraordinary nature of those actions at every step people feel attracted towards them and, imitating them, embark on a course of self-discipline for the realization of the supreme object of human

pursuit. There is no ostentation anywhere in the actions of such exalted souls. Their utterances too are truthful, agreeable, wholesome and authentic. Therefore, none ignores their words. The mind, intellect, senses, body conduct, speech and all else of such exalted souls is unsullied and uncommon. Hence one gets liberated by attaining self-knowledge through their sight and through obedience, service and salutation to them and talking with them (Gītā IV. 34-35). The actions of exalted souls possessed of wisdom conform to their grade in society, stage in life, disposition, as well as to the occasion and place of their action. They cannot, however, demonstrate by example how to perform the duties of men belonging to all grades of society, or every stage in life. Therefore, to the strivers seeking blessedness they can do no better than orally point out the duties pertaining to their grade in society, stage in life and natural disposition and suited to a particular place and time. Therefore, through obedience to them one is able to cross the ocean of mundane existence (Gītā XIII. 25).

A man of real wisdom does not neglect or abandon the duties enjoined by the scriptures, much less perpetrate actions prohibited by the scriptures. For, if they take to such actions people will become immoral and bring about their own ruin. Watching the actions of exalted souls being performed with faith and reverence none can go astray. On the other hand, seeing their virtuous conduct people begin scrupulously to discharge their duties in a selfless manner after their example.


Thus far the sanctity, sublimity and uncommonness of the actions of God-realized saints and the absence of any duty or object worth attaining for them have been dealt with.

Even though God creates, pervades and protects the three worlds, He is free from any obligation (Gītā IV. 13).

When even an emancipated soul has no obligation (Gītā III. 17), much less can there be any obligation for God, who is eternally pure, enlightened and liberated and the ordainer of duties for all. An emancipated soul dwells in this mortal world alone, hence there is no obligation for him here. The Lord, however, is omniscient and omnipotent. He equally abides in all the spheres at all times. That is why He says that He has not the least obligation anywhere in the three worlds. Similarly there is nothing to be achieved by Him. A seeker after Liberation has a liberated life for his goal. But a Jīvanmukta (he who has attained Liberation in this very life) has nothing to achieve because he stands ever united with Brahma, who is Truth, Consciousness and Bliss rolled into one. The Lord, on the other hand, is eternally accomplished of all purpose, nay, everything is already attained by Him, everything belongs to Him alone. He has nothing to achieve inasmuch as there is nothing which is not His.

Thus the Lord has no obligation or object to achieve. Nevertheless, being supremely kind without any motive and exceedingly full of Love, He sets an example before others by performing actions enjoined by the Śāstras for the common good in order to prevent the generality from going astray and put them on the right path. Every action of the Lord is entirely devoid of egotism, affinity, attachment and selfishness. Therefore His actions are conducive to the welfare of the world, supremely pure, sublime and sportlike. It goes without saying that one attains blessedness by imitating His actions and by carrying out His behests. Nay, one gets supremely sanctified and entitled to the highest destiny by merely observing His actions with reverence and love. Therefore, all men, whether they are striving souls or perfect ones, should selflessly perform actions for public

good with a view to maintaining the world order. When the Lord Himself, who is free from obligations and has nothing to achieve, performs actions, much more should others do so. While showing respect to the Śāstras by performing actions with a view to engendering faith in us, the Lord establishes the authority of the scriptures. His actions are out of the common, supramundane and full of sweetness. That is why witnessing the Lord's activities people feel drawn towards them and set to work with great enthusiasm. This leads to the establishment of righteousness, which is an important factor contributing to God's descent into the world of matter. If, having fixed certain bounds of propriety, He does not keep within those bounds Himself, great harm would follow resulting in a chaos in the world order.



An Appeal for Gītā-Pārāyaṇa

On the sacred soil of Kurukṣetra the Kaurava and Pāṇḍava forces stand arrayed ready for a passage of arms. Meanwhile the mighty hero Arjuna is moved to pity at the sight of his own kith and kin in both the armies; nay, regarding participation in that fratricidal war as a great sin he lays down his arms and sinks into the back of his seat in despair. Asked by the Lord what made him so nervous. Arjuna feels puzzled and, surrendering himself to the Lord, approaches Him for guidance. At this very point begins the great teaching of Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā. India, nay, the whole world is in a similar state of confusion today. None is able to find out the right path. Under such circumstances, even as Arjuna surrendering himself to the Lord, his supreme refuge, received the incomparable lesson on right conduct, so should India take refuge in the all-merciful divine Lord and attain an easy access to all-round happiness here as well as hereafter. In those days the “Lord’s Song” too was not available in its present form; that is why the Lord found it necessary to deliver it to Arjuna. Today, however, through our good luck Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā, which was sung by the Lord in His own divine tongue, is easily accessible to us. It is identical with the Lord Himself. It is by taking refuge in this divine song that we should seek to illumine our path of duty.

Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā is the divine message of God Himself. Its glory is unbounded and unfathomable; it cannot be correctly represented. Even Śeṣa (the serpent-god with a thousand tongues), Śiva and Gaṇeśa (the god of learning) cannot describe it in full, much less any human being. The Bhagavadgītā has been glorified at many places in the Epics

as well as in the Purāṇas. But even if the volume of tribute paid to it so far is put together, one cannot say it is all. Really speaking, its glory cannot be fully described. That which is open to description is finite; how can it be infinite?

The Gītā is a most wonderful scripture. The essence of all the Vedas has been compressed into it. Its style is so simple and lovely that it can be easily understood with a little amount of practice; yet its meaning is so deep and hidden that it cannot be fathomed even by a lifelong uninterrupted study. It presents ever new facets of meaning, which, therefore, ever remains unexplored. And if it is studied with a devout and concentrated mind, every word of it will directly appear as pregnant with a deep meaning. The exposition of the virtues, glory and mysteries of God as well as of the paths of Action and Knowledge contained in the Gītā can hardly be found at one place in any other scripture. The Bhagavadgītā is an incomparable work, every word of which is full of wise counsel. There is not a single word in the Gītā, which can be passed over as flattering (रोचक). All that has been said in this book is literally true; to conceive the word of God, who is all Truth, as flattering is to lower its dignity.

The Gītā embodies all sacred books. It comprises the essence of all the scriptures. It will be no exaggeration to speak of it as the treasure-house of all the truths contained in the Śāstras. Having mastered the Gītā, the essential knowledge of all the scriptures can be automatically acquired and requires no extra labour.

The Gītā is even greater than the Gaṅgā. The scriptures hold out Mukti or Liberation as the reward of a dip into the Gaṅgā. He who takes a dip into the Gaṅgā can be liberated himself, but he is not able to redeem others. The man who dives deep into the Gītā, however, not only gets liberated

himself but also acquires the capacity to redeem others. Whereas the holy Gaṅgā has issued from the lotus-feet of Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa, the Gītā has emanated from His sacred lips. Moreover, while the Gaṅgā liberates him alone who goes to it and bathes in it, the Gītā visits every house and shows its inmates the way to liberation. That is why the Gītā is declared as greater than the Gaṅgā.

It has been stated above that the Gītā embodies all the scriptures. The Mahābhārata categorically says so (Bhīṣma., 44.4). * But this is not enough. For while all the scriptures have originated from the Vedas, the latter emanated from the lips of Brahmā (the Creator), and in his turn Brahmā sprang from the lotus in the navel of Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa. In this way the Śāstras stand far remote from the Lord. The Gītā, on the other hand, has directly flowed from the lips of the Lord; hence it would be no exaggeration to declare it as greater than all sacred books. The divine Vedavyāsa himself says:—

“The Gītā alone should be duly studied and celebrated in song; of what avail are the other lengthy scriptures? For the former has flowed from the lotus-like lips of Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa Himself, who has brought forth the lotus of creation from His navel.” † (Mahā., Bhīṣma., 43.1).

The author of the Mahābhārata conveys this truth by the use of the word ‘Padmanābhasya’. He thereby hints that the Gītā has flowed from the lips of the same Lord who brought forth Brahmā through the lotus sprung from His navel, and that from Brahmā’s lips issued the Vedas which form the basis of all the scriptures.

The Gītā is even greater than the Gāyatrī. True, the

* सर्वशास्त्रमयी गीता..... ।

† गीता सुगीता कर्तव्या किमन्यैः शास्त्रविस्तरैः ।

या स्वयं पद्मनाभस्य मुखपद्माद्विनिःसृता ॥

muttering of the Gāyatrī ensures the liberation of man. But whereas he who mutters the Gāyatrī only gets liberated himself, a student of the Gītā not only liberates himself but acquires the capacity of redeeming others too. When the Lord Himself, the Bestower of Liberation, is captivated by him, Mukti becomes a trifling affair to him. It takes up its abode in the dust of his feet. He makes a gift of Mukti to anyone and everyone who asks for it.

Nay, it will be no exaggeration to say that the Gītā is even greater than God Himself. The Lord Himself says:-

“I take My stand on the Gītā, the Gītā is My supreme abode. I maintain the three worlds on the strength of the wisdom contained in the Gītā.”*

Besides this, in the Gītā itself the Lord openly declares that he who follows His injunctions in the shape of the Gītā will be surely liberated; nay, He further says that even he who studies this scripture will have worshipped Him through the ‘sacrifice of wisdom.’ When such is the value of a mere study of the Gītā, what shall we say of the man who has moulded his life according to its teachings and who helps devout souls to grasp its deep meaning and propagates and popularizes its message among them. Such a man is declared by the Lord as dearest to Him. It will be no exaggeration to say that he is dearer to Him than His very self. Nay, the Lord subordinates Himself to the will of such devotees. Even in the case of noble souls we find that he who acts according to their principles is dearer to them than their own life. The Gītā constitutes the Lord’s principal mystic teaching. Such being the case, there is no wonder that he who follows the teachings of the Gītā should be dearer to Him than His very self.

* गीताश्रयेऽहं तिष्ठामि गीता मे चोत्तमं गृहम्।
गीताज्ञानमुपाश्रित्य त्रीँल्लोकान् पालयाम्यहम्॥


The Gītā is the life-breath, the heart and the verbal image of the Lord. He who has his heart, speech and body as well as all his senses and their functions steeped in the Gītā is the very embodiment of the Gītā. His very sight, touch, speech and thought lend supreme sanctity to others, to say nothing of those who follow his precepts and example. In fact, no sacrifice, charity, austerity, pilgrimage, religious vow, self-restraint and fasting etc., stand comparison with the Gītā.

Being the divine message of the Lord, the Gītā is all-sufficient and conducive to every form of blessing, and is entirely benedictory in character. No wonder that the blessed souls who study the Gītā everyday and discharge their duties in accordance with its teachings succeed in the mission of their life; even those who daily undertake one full recitation of the Gītā are able through the grace of Mother Gītā to attain all forms of blessings. I, therefore, address this appeal to the readers collectively to complete at least 1,25,000 full recitations of Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā. Besides contributing their own mite to this sacred undertaking they are also requested to approach the members of their own family, friends and relatives, kith and kin, neighbours and fellow-citizens, and lovingly induce them to participate in the same. The recitation should be undertaken for the pleasure of God in a disinterested spirit. The collective good of the whole universe as well as one's own spiritual good follow from such a practice as a matter of course according to the divine will. The scheme is outlined below.

Dear reader! If convenient to you, you will be well advised to commence recitation of the Gītā the very day you read this article at your convenience. The whole of the Gītā comprises not more than 700 verses. Having acquired the practice one can easily complete one full recitation of

the Gītā in an hour. So long as one is out of practice the recitation may take up even an hour and a half. If possible, one full recitation may be completed in one sitting everyday. If not, it may be finished in two sittings daily—nine chapters in the morning and nine in the evening. At this rate thirty recitations will have been completed in course of a month.

Those lovers of the Gītā and seekers of their own spiritual good and the good of the world as well as those disinterested devotees of God who personally undertake the recitation of the Gītā and induce others to do the same will not only merit the grace of God but will also earn our deep gratitude. The world too will be greatly indebted to them, inasmuch as the healthy influence that this Yajña is calculated to exert on the external surroundings as well as on the mental horizon of the world at large and the happy results that will ensue therefrom will be of a momentous character.



The Theories of Illusion and Evolution in the Gītā

There are passages in the Gītā to support both the theories, and therefore it cannot definitely be said whether the Gītā confirms the one or the other view. In our opinion the Gītā has nothing to do with any of the theories; for it aims at union with the eternal Existence, which is all-knowledge and all-bliss, the Omnipotent Supreme Being, and shows various ways to attain to It, which include, by the way, both the above views as well. Thus we have:-

अव्यक्तादव्यक्तयः सर्वाः प्रभवन्त्यहरागमे ।
रात्र्यागमे प्रलीयन्ते तत्रैवाव्यक्तसञ्ज्ञके ॥
भूतग्रामः स एवायं भूत्वा भूत्वा प्रलीयते ।
रात्र्यागमेऽवशः पार्थ प्रभवत्यहरागमे ॥

(Gītā VIII. 18-19)

“From the Unmanifest (subtle body of Brahma) all the manifested stream forth at the coming of the day; at the coming of night they dissolve, even in what is called the Unmanifest.” Even Brahmā along with his abode disappears after completing a hundred years of his existence.

“This multitude of beings, thus coming into the becoming again and again, dissolves itself at the coming of night; by ordination, O Pārtha, it streams forth again at the coming of day.”

From these verses it is clear that all manifest material forms evolve out of the unmanifested cosmic form and in the end dissolve in it. Here it is not said that they ‘seem’ to evolve and dissolve and do not actually do so. On the contrary, it is clearly stated that the unmanifested manifests itself and the manifest again becomes unmanifest. The subtle cosmic body comprising all these unmanifested

elements, itself dissolve into the Primordial Unmanifested Nature at the end of the Great Dissolution (महाप्रलय), and then comes out of it again. It is this Primordial Unmanifest Nature that has been termed 'महद्ब्रह्म' in verses 3 and 4 of Chapter XIV. This Mahad Brahma is said to be the original source of all manifestations at the beginning of the great cycle of manifestation. All this expansion of matter is due to this original power. In verses 19 and 12 of Chapter XIII also the Twenty-three elements which are effects and causes both are said to be the expansion of Nature.* This, in short, means that all that we see and perceive is an effect of

* Ether, air, fire, water and earth in their primary subtle forms, and the five objects, i.e., word, touch, form, taste and scent—these ten are called the effects. The discriminative faculty, the ego, the mind, the five senses of perception and the five organs of action, all numbering thirteen, are called the instruments. The third verse of the Sāṅkhya-Kārikā tells us that out of the 25 elements recognized in the Sāṅkhya System, viz., Puruṣa (Spirit), Prakṛti (Primordial Matter), Mahat (Intelligence), Ahankāra (Ego), the five Tanmātrās (subtle elements), Manas (mind), the five organs of sense-perception and five more of action, and the five gross elements, viz., ether, air, fire, water and earth, Prakṛti is the cause and not an effect the next seven, beginning with Mahat, are both causes and effects. The next sixteen are effects only and the Puruṣa (Spirit) is neither a cause nor an effect.

मूलप्रकृतिरविकृतिर्महदाद्याः प्रकृतिविकृतयः सप्त ।

षोडशकस्तु विकारो न प्रकृतिर्न विकृतिः पुरुषः ॥

The Unmanifested Māyā is known as Primordial Matter. Being uncaused it is said to be the original cause and not the effect of any cause. Mahat, Ahankāra and the five Tanmātrās or essential conditions of the five elements are both causes and effects. The organs of sense-perception and action, the mind and the five elements, numbering sixteen in all, are effects only, being the effects of the seven last enumerated. They are not causes for they do not evolve further. According to the Sāṅkhya view, the order of manifestation or unfolding of Nature is as follows: Mahat evolves from the Primordial Nature, from Mahat the Ego, from the Ego the five essences and the eleven senses including the mind, and from these five essences the five elements. The order is the same as in the 5th verse of Chapter XIII of the Gītā.

Nature. Nature itself has evolved into this state. The four types of organic bodies that are born with the individual soul are begotten of a union of Matter and Spirit. The physical forms of all such embodied souls are products of Nature, while the consciousness manifesting therein is a portion of the Supreme Being. The seed of consciousness is laid by the Lord, the Father of all.

The Lord says:—

सर्वयोनिषु कौन्तेय मूर्तयः सम्भवन्ति याः ।
तासां ब्रह्म महद्योनिरहं बीजप्रदः पिता ॥

(Gītā XIV. 4)

“O son of Kuntī of all these forms that are born in various wombs, the mother is the Māyā consisting of the three Guṇas, who holds them in her womb, and I the father who lays the seed.” Thus, in the Gītā we find at various places the Spirit with Nature being mentioned as responsible for the birth of all creatures. Somewhere it is said that under the supervision of the Lord the Nature brings forth the various creatures (IX. 10), whereas at other places it is mentioned that ‘I’ (God Himself) bring them forth (IX. 8). Both these utterances embody the same truth.

All that has been said up till now clearly proves that all this movable and immovable existence is an evolute of Nature. The Supreme Being is not an evolving Principle. He is beyond the qualities of Nature. In this process of evolution of matter the Supreme Being is the inspirer, the helper and is not affected thereby in anyway. It is said in verse 20 of Chapter VIII that “beyond the unmanifested Nature there is the eternal unmanifest Supreme Being, who is immutable and unaffected ever the same as before.” Therefore the Gītā says that he alone knows aright who knows that God is imperishable and always the same even after all other existences have been wiped out.

समं सर्वेषु भूतेषु तिष्ठन्तं परमेश्वरम्।
विनश्यत्स्वविनश्यन्तं यः पश्यति स पश्यति॥

(Gītā XIII. 27)

“The Supreme Lord dwells equally in all existences as imperishable among things that perish. Only he sees asight who sees Him.”


The Supreme Being undergoes no change. He is eternally pure and conscious. It is this transient world which changes. The Gītā supports this theory of evolution.

On the other hand, there are many passages in the Gītā on the authority of which the commentators of the Advaita (Monistic) school of thought establish their Māyāvāda, the theory of Illusion. The Lord has said, “Look at the wonder of My Yogamāyā which makes this non-existing world look as having evolved out of Me (न च मत्स्थानि भूतानि पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम्। IX. 5), i.e., in reality the world does not exist in Me. But it looks as if it is, and therefore it is. Thus, all this is the play of My power of Illusion (माया). Just as one may see a non-existing serpent in a bit of rope, likewise, this world, though unreal (non-existing), appears as real through our ignorance. The Lord further says: “Just as the ether-born air, which moves everywhere, is always there in the ether, know thou that all these existences born of My Will are likewise in Me.” But this does not mean that, like the ether-born air moving always in ether, this world exists in the Supreme Being. The analogy is intended only to give an indication of the matter. In the seventh chapter the Lord has said, “The Sāttvika, the Rājasika and the Tāmasika ideas and impulses do come from Me; but in reality I in them and they in Me are not” (न त्वहं तेषु ते मयि।-VII. 12).

“There is nothing other than Myself”—(मत्तः परतरं नान्यत् किञ्चिदस्ति धनंजय।-VII. 7); “All is Vāsudeva and nothing else” (वासुदेवः सर्वमिति-VII. 19); “As this world has been described,

it is not realized here (on careful thought)” (न रूपमस्येह तथोपलभ्यते-XV. 3); these and other such passages lend very strong support to the theory of Illusion, and it seems that there is nothing save the One Supreme Being. All that appears is a phantom (माया).

Thus we have passages in the Gītā to support both the theories. But, to our mind, the Gītā does not propound any one-sided theory; it is not meant for that purpose. On the contrary, it synthesises all the different theories and shows various ways to the attainment of the Supreme. Men inclined towards either view may get a sufficient support from the Gītā and therefore the Gītā is for all. Each one according to his view and capacity may follow the Gītā and set out on the path to the Divine.



Action, Wrong Action and Inaction According to Gītā

कर्मणो ह्यपि बोद्धव्यं बोद्धव्यं च विकर्मणः ।
अकर्मणश्च बोद्धव्यं गहना कर्मणो गतिः ॥

(Gītā IV. 17)

“It is necessary to understand about action as well as to understand about wrong action, and about inaction also it is necessary to understand; mysterious is the path of action.”

The nature of action is really too intricate to be easily seen through; it is therefore that the Lord lays a great emphasis on the necessity of knowing the truth about it and also explains the thing. Karma or action has been classified under three heads: action (कर्म), wrong action (विकर्म) and inaction (अकर्म). It is very difficult to ascertain what the Lord actually meant by these terms, yet whatever strikes us on a careful study is being presented to the readers. Generally it is held by the learned that कर्म means right action, which results in happiness here or hereafter, विकर्म or wrong action is that which results in suffering here or in the next world, while अकर्म (inaction) is that action or renunciation of action which does not produce any reaction. It is becoming further difficult for us to understand the real significance of these three because we are in the habit of calling all that we do with our mind, speech or body as Karma. But really it is not so. Had it been so, there was nothing mysterious about it to baffle the intellect of ordinary men. The Lord would not have mystified us in that case by saying that even the most intelligent are perplexed as to what is action and what inaction (किं कर्म किमकर्मेति कवयोऽप्यत्र मोहिताः । Gītā IV. 16). Nor could He have called the subject of action as something very intricate. This proves that the outward action of mind, speech or body or their ceasing to

function does not constitute action or wrong action or inaction. It solely depends on the motive of the doer whether an action is to be classed as action, wrong action or inaction. Ordinarily the following distinction should be borne in mind in this connection.

Action

Only right actions performed with the mind, body or speech, in conformity with the scriptural ordinance, are generally recognized as coming under the category of Karma. But even such actions may eventually turn out to be wrong actions or even inaction according to the motive of the doer; for the motive is the main test here.

(1) A right action done in the right way, as enjoined by the Śāstras, with the best of motives and with a desire for some return, is what is called action.

(2) Even an action coming under the category of duty, such as sacrifice, austerity, alms-giving or service, which is done with the worst of motives, turns out to be wrong action, characterised as it is by a predominance of Tamas (ignorance and darkness). For instance, the Gītā says:—

मूढग्राहेणात्मनो यत्पीडया क्रियते तपः ।
परस्योत्सादनार्थं वा तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥

(XVII. 19)

“Austerity which is practised under a deluded understanding or by sheer bravado, with self-mortification or with the object of harming another is characterised as partaking of Tamas.”

(3) A-Action performed as one's duty without any desire for return, and consecrated to the Divine (Gītā IX. 27-28; XII. 10-11) or done from the very beginning for God's sake does not result in anything other than liberation, and is therefore called inaction.

B-Action done without any ego-sense and with the mind inseparably united with God is also not productive of any other result than liberation and is therefore inaction (Gītā III. 28; V. 8-9; XIV. 19).

Wrong Action

Ordinarily only prohibited actions, proceeding from the mind, speech or body, such as doing injury to others, telling lies and thieving, etc., are recognised as wrong actions; but they, too, eventually turn out to be actions or inaction also according to the motive of the doer; for motive is the main test here as well.

(1) Even such actions as killing or injuring others, done with the best of motives, though with a desire for happiness in this or the other world, (even though appearing to be wrong actions) are regarded as Karma (Gītā II. 37).

(2) Wrong actions done with a bad motive are, of course, 'wrong'.

(3) Actions such as killing or doing injury to others, done with the best of motives and by way of duty, without any ego-sense or attachment, (though appearing to be wrong) are not productive of any result and are therefore regarded as inaction (Gītā. II. 38; XVIII. 17).

Inaction

Inaction does not merely consist in the absence of all action proceeding from the mind, speech or body. Renunciation of action, though appearing as inaction, can take the form of action or wrong action as well according to the motive of the renouncer, motive being the chief determining factor here also.

(1) An aspirant who, having renounced all activities of mind, speech and body, dwells in solitude and thinks that

he has renounced all action, is credited with the action of renunciation even though he appears to do nothing, because he recognises himself to be the renouncer. Such inaction is accounted as action.

(2) In times of difficulty and crisis, when a man out of fear or selfishness shirks his duty and refuses to perform even such actions as are enjoined upon him, puts up a show of renunciation with the motive of cheating others, the apparent inaction in all these cases is not inaction, but, being productive of evil consequences, is considered to be wrong and sinful.

(3) Absence of all action at the time of Samādhi (absolute absorption) on the part of one who is unified with God and has his ego-sense merged in Him, is real inaction (Gītā II. 55, 58; VI. 19, 25).

Thus action, wrong action and inaction cannot be determined only by activity or inactivity; it is the motive alone which makes them what they are. Even an action can be turned into inaction and vice versa by the motive of the doer or renouncer of actions. He alone who knows this secret intimately and rightly is, according to the Gītā, the most intelligent man, a perfect Yogī and a doer of all actions (स बुद्धिमान् मनुष्येषु स युक्तः कृत्स्नकर्मकृत्। IV. 18), and is delivered of all evil and grief in the shape of transmigration (यज्ज्ञात्वा मोक्षयसेऽशुभात्।-IV. 16).



God, Soul and Matter in the Gītā

The principles that have been described as Aparā Prakṛti (Lower Nature), Parā Prakṛti (Higher Nature), and Aham (I) respectively in the 4th, 5th and 6th verses of Chapter VII of Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā have come up as Kṣetra (Field), Kṣetrajña (the Knower of the Field) and 'माम्' (Me) in the 1st and 2nd verses of Chapter XIII and then again as Kṣara (destructible), Akṣara (Indestructible) and Puruṣottama (the Supreme Being) in the 16th and 17th verses of Chapter XV. In all the three chapters the expressions 'Aparā Prakṛti', 'Kṣetra' and 'Kṣara' stand for the material world; 'Parā Prakṛti', 'Kṣetrajña' and 'Akṣara' stand for the individual soul; and 'Aham', 'माम्' and 'Puruṣottama' stand for the Supreme Lord.

Kṣara

The Prakṛti and its modifications, which are all mutable in character, have been elaborately dealt with in the 5th verse of Chapter XIII, which runs as under:—

महाभूतान्यहङ्कारो बुद्धिरव्यक्तमेव च ।
इन्द्रियाणि दशैकं च पञ्च चेन्द्रियगोचराः ॥

“The ether, air, fire, water and earth in their essential primary conditions, the Ego, the Intellect, the Unmanifest Nature, i.e., Māyā consisting of the three Guṇas, the ten organs (of perception and action), the mind and the five sense-objects, viz., sound, touch, sight, taste and odour, all numbering twenty-four, constitute the elemental nature. This is, in short, the eightfold Nature as mentioned in the 4th verse of Chapter VII.

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च ।
अहङ्कार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥

“The earth, water, fire, air and ether, the sense-mind and the discriminative mind, and the Ego, these constitute My eightfold nature.”

In the 16th verse of Chapter XV all these have been called by the name of Kṣara ‘क्षरः सर्वाणि भूतानि’ (All existences constitute what is called by the name of Kṣara, i.e., Prakṛti). Or one may reverse the order and say that what has been called Kṣara here has been amplified and called the eightfold Nature, and the eightfold Nature has been amplified into the twenty-four elements. In substance, all those three are one. Then, in the 30th verse of Chapter VII and the 1st and 2nd verses of Chapter VIII we have the word ‘अधिभूतम्’ (the objective phenomenon) and in the 20th verse of Chapter XIII we have (the tenfold) कार्य (effect) and (the thirteen) करण (instruments) and (one) Nature—कार्यकरणकर्तृत्वे हेतुः प्रकृतिरुच्यते; and further in the 3rd and 4th verses of Chapter XIV we have ‘महद्ब्रह्म’ (Nature) and ‘मूर्त्यः’ (forms)—all these words meaning the transient world with Nature as described above.

Akṣara

The Parā Prakṛti (Higher Nature) of verse 5 of Chapter VII, and Kṣetrajña (the Knower of the Field) in verse 2 of Chapter XIII and Kūṭastha (the Unchanging) and Akṣara (the indestructible) in verse 16 of Chapter XV—all these terms stand for one and the same embodied soul, which is superior to Nature, which is the knower, which is conscious and which is eternal. In verse 16 of Chapter XV we read—‘कूटस्थोऽक्षर उच्यते’. Here the words ‘कूटस्थ’ and ‘अक्षर’ suggest to some that they mean ‘Nature’ or Māyā. But the words ‘अक्षर’ and ‘कूटस्थ’ nowhere occur in the Gītā in that sense. On the contrary, they invariably mean the embodied soul and the Supreme Soul respectively. One may profitably refer on this

point to verse 8, Chapter VI, Chapter XII, verse 3, Chapter VIII, verse 21, and Chapter III, verse 15.

Later on, in verse 18 of Chapter XV the Lord says, "I am beyond Kṣara (the mutable) and superior even to the Akṣara (the Indestructible). If the word 'Akṣara' is taken to be called Himself Nature, the Lord would have been only 'beyond' it, for He is beyond Nature and not Superior to it. The Lord says:—

त्रिभिर्गुणमयैर्भावैरेभिः सर्वमिदं जगत् ।
मोहितं नाभिजानाति मामेभ्यः परमव्ययम् ॥
दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया ।

(Gītā VII. 13-14)

"By these three kinds of objects which are of the nature of the Guṇas (modes), this whole world is deluded and does not recognize Me as beyond them and imperishable."

"This is My divine Māyā consisting of the three Guṇas and is very difficult to cross over."

These verses clearly point out that Nature is Guṇa-bound and the Lord is beyond the Guṇas. Nowhere has the word 'उत्तम' (superior) been used for the Lord in relation to Nature. Therefore the word 'अक्षर' cannot mean here anything other than the soul. The Lord may be superior but not 'beyond' the deluded conscious soul. That the word 'अक्षर' here therefore does not mean Nature, that it means the embodied soul is quite clear. Śrīdhara Swāmī also has accepted this view.

Now this embodied soul is the 'पुरुष' of verses 19, 20 and 21 of Chapter XIII and the 'अध्यात्म' of verses 1 and 3 of Chapter VIII. There he (the Puruṣa) has been described as seated in Nature and enjoying happiness and grief and taking good or evil births; and therefore the word 'Puruṣa' there cannot mean anything other than the embodied soul. By the words 'जीवभूत' (having become the Jīva—the embodied

soul) in verse 7 of Chapter XV and 'Īśvara' (God in verse 8 of the same chapter and 'गर्भ' (womb) and 'बीज' (seed) in verse 3 of Chapter XIV, the same embodied soul is meant. The embodied soul is conscious, immobile, everlasting, eternal and an enjoyer. These are its attributes and they are clearly explained by these various names.

Puruṣottama

This principle is by far the most difficult to understand and so the Divine Lord has explained it in various ways. The Puruṣottama, the Highest Being, is described in one place as the Creator and Preserver and Destroyer; in another as the Ruler; in the third as the Holder and Maintainer; in the fourth as the Highest Being, the Supreme Lord, the Supreme Being, the Indestructible God and so on. 'अहम्' (I), 'माम्' (Me) and such other words occurring in different contexts throughout the Gītā speak of this very transcendent Unmanifest Eternal Consciousness, Knowledge and Bliss, as in Chapter VII, verse 6; Chapter XV, verse 17; Chapter XV, verse 18 and 15; Chapter XIII, Verse 27.

Of the principles Kṣara, Akṣara and Puruṣottama, Kṣara or the ever-changing Nature is material and liable to perish. The unchanging embodied soul is eternal, conscious and blissful, beyond nature and a portion of the Supreme Lord and therefore inseparable from Him, though apparently separated as bound by Ignorance. When this ignorance is effaced by knowledge, the soul becomes one with the Supreme; it is no longer said to be distinct from the latter and therefore in reality it is not separate. The Puruṣottama, the Supreme Being, is eternally Absolute, beyond Nature, the Supreme origin of all, unborn and imperishable. In relation to Nature He is called by such names as the Maintainer, the Enjoyer and the Lord of all existences.

Nature and all creation is only a superimposition (अध्यारोप) on the Supreme Being. In reality there is nothing other than the Supreme Being. To realize this supreme fact in all its bearings is to attain to the Highest Status and Liberation. One must therefore be up to know it. The Lord says:-

तं विद्याद्दुःखसंयोगवियोगं योगसंज्ञितम् ।
स निश्चयेन योक्तव्यो योगोऽनिर्विण्णचेतसा ॥

(Gītā VI. 23)

“Know that, then, which is free from the contact with sorrow, which is called Yoga. It has to be resolutely practised with a cheerful spirit, not yielding to any discouragement.”



Difference between Meaning and Secret

(Implications of a verse of the Gītā)

There was a highly contented, virtuous and learned Brāhmaṇa, who was poor, so far as earthly riches were concerned. His wife was a perfectly devoted wife, endowed with both learning and knowledge of the Reality, and was a liberated soul. The ruler of the place, also, possessed knowledge of Truth, and was a saint, liberated from worldly bondage. The wife of the Brāhmaṇa one day thought within herself: “My husband is contented, learned and virtuous; hence he is qualified for the attainment of liberation. If somehow he comes in contact with our saintly ruler, he may also quickly attain the knowledge of Truth, and obtain liberation.” Reflecting thus, she approached her husband and made the following submission to him: “Lord! our resources have almost come to their end, and I find no way whereby we may replenish them. People say that we possess a saintly ruler, who is well-disposed towards Brāhmaṇas and very generous by nature. If you kindly once meet him, he may welcome you, and render you proper help. According to the scriptures, a gift made by a King unasked should be treated as nectar by a Brāhmaṇa. You are already aware of this.”

The Brāhmaṇa replied: “What you say is no doubt true; but unless I have rendered some service in return, I consider it unworthy of me to accept a gift, even though given unasked, and use it for our maintenance. Hence I am positively opposed to what you say, although I may have to starve.”

The Brāhmaṇa’s wife said-“You are a learned man and can certainly give some instruction to the King, which will be a service to him.”

This argument produced some effect on the mind of the Brāhmaṇa, nevertheless he felt most reluctant to go to the King. But his wife's much pressure ultimately prevailed upon him, and at last he came to attend the King's Court. The Brāhmaṇa's merits and virtuous conduct had already earned for him a fame throughout the country. The King welcomed him with much show of respect and honour. After exchange of formal courtesies, he got from the treasury a purse of gold coins and presented the same to the Brāhmaṇa. But the latter, declining the gift, said—"Your Majesty! I know how generous you are. But I am bound by a rule, which I have adopted for my conduct. Even though offered unasked, I cannot accept a gift, unless I have rendered some service to the giver in return. Please give me some work to do: if I can satisfy you through its performance, you may thereafter offer me whatever you like, which I shall accept from you." The King rejoined, "Thank you, Panditji, for what you say. You are a virtuous and learned Brāhmaṇa. I want to hear the secret of the Gītā from your lips. Please explain to me the meaning and secret of verse 16 of Chapter XII of the Gītā."

The Brāhmaṇa, first, read out the verse, and then explained the meaning of every word

अनपेक्षः शुचिर्दक्ष उदासीनो गतव्यथः ।

सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥

"He who craves for nothing, who is both internally and externally pure, is clever and impartial, and has risen above all distractions, who renounced the feeling of doership in all undertakings—that devotee is dear to Me."

Thereafter, he began to comment on the verse as follows—

He who is not swayed by any wish, craving or desire,

whose desires are all fulfilled, and hence who is not dependent on anything, is called 'अनपेक्ष' (not craving for anything).

One whose heart is exceptionally pure, and whose external conduct also exhibits no perturbation, and is pure and righteous, whose very sight, speech and touch bring purity to others, is 'शुचि' (pure).

True 'दक्षता' (cleverness) lies in gaining the great object for which the human body has been obtained, viz., direct realization of God. He who attains success in this is called 'दक्ष' (clever).

He who, while acting as a deponent, assessor or arbitrator, shows no partiality to any side out of personal considerations of relationship or friendship, or under the influence of any form of attraction, hatred, greed, infatuation and fear, and who ever remains perfectly impartial is called 'उदासीन' (impartial).

One who remains unaffected, when faced with the greatest cause of misery and sorrow; in other words, whose heart ever remains free from dejection, sadness and grief, is called 'गतव्यथ' (risen above distractions).

He who renouncing all forms of external and internal activities, depends only on Prārabdha (destiny), and does nothing for the satisfaction of his own self-interest, and feels contented with whatever is obtained unasked, and who does not identify his self with the acts taking place under the force of 'Prārabdha' (destiny)—such a renouncer of both external and internal acts is called 'सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी' (renouncer of the feeling of doership in all undertakings).

When the Brāhmaṇa thus concluded his exposition on the verse, the King, with show of much humility, remarked—"Revered Panditji! You have given us a splendid exposition on the verse. Whatever you said was quite reasonable, and faithfully followed the scriptures. But all

the same, I have a suspicion that you are yet unacquainted with the secret of the verse.” Somewhat irritated, the Pandit replied—“If I am unacquainted with the secret, how could I give this exposition on the motive of the verse? I have committed to memory fifty-two commentaries on the Gītā. If there is any secret beyond what I stated, which is known to you, please explain it yourself.”

Instead of giving any direct reply to what the Brāhmaṇa said, the King, again, humbly submitted—“Panditji! Your nice exposition following the scriptures has given me great satisfaction; I am extremely thankful to you. Kindly, therefore, accept my offering.”

The Brāhmaṇa replied, “When Your Majesty remarked that I was unacquainted with the secret import of the verse, the expression of satisfaction has no real foundation. It is nothing but verbal satisfaction. I am not prepared to accept anything till Your Majesty is really satisfied.” Although the King pressed the Brāhmaṇa, again and again, with much humility, the latter refused the gift of the King, and returned home empty-handed. Thereupon, the King sent for a trustworthy spy and instructed him to follow the Brāhmaṇa to his home, and report to him what transpired there. According to this instruction, the spy followed the Brāhmaṇa closely watched whatever the latter did and overheard all the conversation.

Returning home, questioned by his wife, the Brāhmaṇa faithfully reported all that had taken place at the King’s Court. The lady, thereupon, humbly and lovingly remarked, “Dear! What the King said appears to me quite just and proper. You ought not to have felt offended at this.”

Brāhmaṇa—(Somewhat in anger, and feeling hurt) Strange! You, also, support the King?

Wife—O dear! Do you not always say that one should support a just statement?

Brāhmaṇa—(Further excited, but exercising control over himself) Do you mean to say that the King's statement, that my explanation was nice, although I did not understand the secret of the verse, was a just one?

Wife—Pardon me, dear! What the King said was quite right. It is easy to explain a verse, but very difficult to understand its real secret.

Brāhmaṇa—How?

Wife—Just as a gramophone record may give out a song, but this does not mean that it understands the meaning and secret of the song.

Brāhmaṇa—Do you mean to say that I am only like a mechanical gramophone?

Wife—When we find a person who delivers nice instructions to others, but does not practise what he teaches, how should we differentiate between him and a gramophone? Have you realized in life all that you preached to the King?

Brāhmaṇa—Why not? What deficiency do you find in me?

Wife—Please, give me a patient hearing. I request you to explain to me every word of that verse. What is the real implication of the word 'अनपेक्ष'?

Brāhmaṇa—He who is not swayed by any form of wish, craving or desire, whose desires are all fulfilled, and therefore who is not dependent on anything, is called 'अनपेक्ष' (not craving for anything).

Wife—Do you possess this qualification?

Brāhmaṇa—Why not? I suffer from no wish, craving or desire. I went to the King only under your pressure, and though the King entreated me hard, I did not accept any gift from him.

Wife—All right! I agree you went to the King's Court only at my request. It was really an act of kindness on your part. Please explain the next word 'शुचि'.

Brāhmaṇa—He whose heart is extremely pure, external conduct is free from agitation, pure and just, and whose very sight, speech and touch bring purity to others, is called 'शुचि' (pure).

Wife—Are you, internally and externally, as pure as the verse indicates? Do your sight, speech and touch make man pure? Does your mind suffer from no modification? Is your external conduct free from agitation, and righteous and pure? If so, why did your mind entertain anger and feel agitated, and why did you exhibit pride in your utterance before the King?

Brāhmaṇa—(Submissively) You are correct; I lack this qualification.

Wife—How did you explain the word 'दक्ष' (clever)?

Brāhmaṇa—Gaining the great object for which this existence as a human being has been obtained, in other words, the success in God-realization, constitutes 'cleverness'. He who attains success in this is called 'दक्ष' (clever).

Wife—Have you attained the object for which you have come to the world? Have you gained the Supreme State? If not, the criticism of the King was quite proper.

Brāhmaṇa—Here also you are correct. This qualification, too, is absent in me.

Wife—What is the meaning of the word 'उदासीन'?

Brāhmaṇa—He who while acting as a neutral such as a assessor or arbitrator, shows no partiality out of considerations of relationship and friendliness, or under the influence of attraction, hatred, greed, infatuation and fear, and who ever, under every circumstance, remains perfectly impartial, is called 'उदासीन' (impartial).

Wife—Are you, then, free from partiality? Did you not support your own point of view, as against that of the King? Did you deeply consider the remark made by the King that you did not understand the secret of the verse? If not, why do you say that the criticism of the King was improper?

Brāhmaṇa—(Meekly and artlessly owning his deficiency with a pure heart). What you say is absolutely correct. You have truly opened my eyes today. This qualification of 'impartiality' is greatly wanting in me. In a controversy, though realizing the weakness of my arguments, I do not yield, but go on obstinately upholding my standpoint.

Wife—Now, how do you explain the word 'गतव्यथ'?

Brāhmaṇa—When faced with even the greatest of sorrow, or cause of misery, one who does not feel distressed, in other words, whose mind never gets obsessed with dejection, misery or grief, is called 'गतव्यथ' (risen above distractions).

Wife—Do you never feel any pain in your mind? If so, why did you feel perturbed and distressed over the King's criticism and my support of it?

Brāhmaṇa—What you say is true. I totally lack this quality. When anything happens contrary to the inclination of my mind, I feel not only pain, but modifications like fear, excitement, jealousy, grief, etc., make their appearance in my mind in an aggravated form.

Wife—We come to the next word. How do you interpret the term 'सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी'?

Brāhmaṇa—One who depends on Prārabdha alone, renouncing all external and internal acts, who does nothing for the satisfaction of his self-interest, and remains contented with whatever he gets unasked, and has no sense of doership in regard to acts taking place according to the

force of Prārabdha—such a renouncer of both external and internal acts is called 'सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी' (renouncer of doership in all undertakings).

Wife—The explanation you have given is very nice, but please tell me whether you have actually renounced all external and internal acts. Does not your mind ever dwell on any worldly thought? If not, why should you be obsessed with so much pride? Externally, you are engaged in every form of activity.

Brāhmaṇa—True, this mark is totally absent in me. I have now understood all my defects. Till now I explained the verses of the Gītā only according to their word-meaning. I had no acquaintance with their secret. Please, therefore, give me your consent, I shall renounce all acts, externally and internally both and turn a Saṁnyāsī in the true sense of the term. Saying this, the Brāhmaṇa renounced everything, and started to leave his home.

Thereupon, the Brāhmaṇa's wife supplicated, "O my Lord, I also want to follow you."

Brāhmaṇa—No, I have no mind to carry any trouble with me. Moreover, how can I allow a woman to come with me?

Wife—Lord! Please do not look upon me as a trouble. I shall not hinder your spiritual practices. I did not send you to the King for the sake of wealth. I used this only as a means, but my real object was that you realized the primary object of life. Our King is a saint, a liberated soul, who possesses true wisdom. Endowed as you are with knowledge of Dharma, and qualifications like virtue, renunciation, contentment and learning, etc., you might through contact with the King succeed in realizing God with this motive in mind I sent you to the King. Now, if you kindly give me permission, I want to be a partner with you in your spiritual practices.


Brāhmaṇa—(Full of gratitude) Now, I understand everything. Truly, your presence will be no obstacle in my path. You are, indeed, my best friend, who has done the truest service to me. He only who helps one in the realization of God is a friend in the true sense of the term. Then, follow me; in my retirement, also, you will help me in realizing God.

Thereafter, both of them renouncing everything walked out of their home.

The spy deputed by the King faithfully reported to his master all that he had heard and seen at the Brāhmaṇa's cottage. Hearing this the King also, who even before this had transferred his authority over the kingdom and treasury, etc., to his son, left the kingdom and took to a hermit's life. On the highway, he saw the Brāhmaṇa couple coming towards him. With very great delight, he exclaimed, "Revered Panditji! Now I see you have understood the secret of that verse of the Gītā."

Meekly, the Brāhmaṇa replied—"No, I have not yet understood it, but in order to understand the verse, I have taken to this path."

The King also joined the couple, and the three, selecting a solitary and sacred place, began to lead their life of retirement. The King and the Brāhmaṇa's wife were both saints and liberated souls, who possessed the knowledge of Truth. Through association with them, the Brāhmaṇa also now succeeded in realizing God.



Some Questions Bearing on the Gītā

A friend has sent some questions, which are reproduced below in a corrected form:—

(1) Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the fullest manifestation of Brahma; the scriptures tell us that ‘Kṛṣṇa is Bhagavān Himself’ (‘कृष्णस्तु भगवान् स्वयम्’). Now, He being the Paramātmā, the very embodiment of Knowledge, why should He find it necessary to extract the milk of the knowledge of Reality from the Upaniṣads. Why did He take recourse to them at all?

(2) Was Arjuna deficient in reverence compared to the present-day admirers of the Gītā? If he was not deficient, why did the Lord quote the authority of the scriptures in support of His teachings, and why in the end it became necessary to show him His Cosmic Form?

(3) Arjuna had acquired the knowledge of the Gītā, and yet why did he later approach the Lord to say, “Lord, whatever you told me on the battle-field in a friendly way, I have forgotten.” Does this mean that Arjuna missed the Knowledge he had once received?

(4) In reply to the above, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa said, “O Dhanañjaya, at the time I communicated that Knowledge to you I was attached to Self through Yoga; I am therefore unable now to repeat that instruction to you.” Are we to understand from this that even the omniscient Lord became self-forgetful, and hence expressed inability to repeat that instruction? Again, What is the meaning of His being attached to Self through Yoga?

(5) If we admit that the Lord failed to repeat the teachings of the Gītā to Arjuna, then how was it possible for Vedavyāsa to record them after several days?

(6) If the Gītā records the very words that proceeded from the sacred lips of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, then what is

the meaning of the following words of Śrī Vyāsadeva addressed to Śrī Gaṇeśa?—

लेखको भारतस्यास्य भव त्वं गणनायक।
मयैव प्रोच्यमानस्य मनसा कल्पितस्य च॥

(Mahābhārata, Ādiparva, I. 77)

“O Gaṇapati! be thou the writer to my dictation of this Mahābhārata, which now exists as a conception in my mind, to which I want to give expression.” Gītā is a part of the Mahābhārata. Does it mean this was also a creation of the mind of Vyāsadeva and all the verses were, in fact, composed by him?

Answers to these questions are serially as given below:—

(1) The Upaniṣads, forming as they do a part of the Vedas, which are like the breath of nostrils of Śrī Bhagavān, are regarded as containing the teachings of the eternal truth by Śrī Bhagavān Himself. There is no question of taking shelter under them; the Lord must have used them in order to enhance their glory in this world. Moreover, the language of the Upaniṣads and their method of treatment being abstruse and somewhat complicated, the majority of people are unable to follow them. Hence for the good of the world the Lord has squeezed the nectar and condensed the essence of the Upaniṣads in the form of the Gītā. In reality, the Upaniṣads and the Gītā teach one and the same thing.

(2) There can be no comparison between Arjuna and men of the present age. Arjuna was a favourite devotee endowed with great reverence and supreme faith. The Lord Himself has acknowledged through His own lips:—

‘भक्तोऽसि मे सखा चेति’

(Gītā IV. 3)

‘इष्टोऽसि मे दृढमिति’

(Gītā XVIII. 64)

‘प्रियोऽसि मे’

(Gītā XVIII. 65)

“Thou art My devotee, friend, dearly beloved and dear,” etc. It was the unalloyed love of this dear friend Arjuna that led the Lord to become his constant companion, or even to accept the role of a charioteer to him. The invocation of the present-day devotees does not induce the Lord to be present even at their worship. Therefore, it would be an error to imagine that Arjuna was deficient in reverence. That the Lord quoted the authority of the Vedas was to enhance the utility and respect of the Vedas in popular estimation! As regards manifestation of the Cosmic Form, Arjuna’s faith and reverence were the prime cause of it. The proof of that faith is amply found in all that Arjuna said in the Tenth Chapter of the Gītā. He said:-

परं ब्रह्म परं धाम पवित्रं परमं भवान्।
 पुरुषं शाश्वतं दिव्यमादिदेवमजं विभुम्॥
 सर्वमेतदृतं मन्ये यन्मां वदसि केशव।
 न हि ते भगवन्व्यक्तिं विदुर्देवा न दानवाः॥
 स्वयमेवात्मनात्मानं वेत्थ त्वं पुरुषोत्तम।
 भूतभावन भूतेश देवदेव जगत्पते॥

(Gītā X. 12, 14, 15)

“Thou art Supreme Brahma, the Supreme Abode and the Supreme Purifier, the Eternal Self-luminous Puruṣa, the Prime Deity, Birthless and All-pervading. O Keśava, all this that Thou sayest to me, I regard as true. O Lord, neither the gods nor the demons know Thee, manifested through Thy Līlā (Sport). O Creator of beings, O Lord of beings, God of gods, the Lord of the universe, O the Supreme Puruṣa, Thou Thyself alone by Thyself knowest Thyself.”

Through these expressions Arjuna’s feeling of reverence seems to be boiling over. Knowing as he did, and expressing, the glory of the Lord in these terms, Arjuna (in the 11th Chapter) makes the prayer—“Lord, you are verily what You have described Yourself to be (in the 10th

Chapter); nevertheless, O Supreme Puruṣa, I desire directly to see Thy Form infused with Knowledge, glory, power, strength, vigour and splendour—'द्रष्टुमिच्छामि ते रूपम्'. Arjuna had supreme faith in the Lord; he knew, and believed in, the glory of the Lord. It is therefore that he craves for a direct vision of the divine Universal Form. It is the wont of the Lord to satisfy the desire of His devotees, hence He blessed Arjuna with that vision. Faith was the cause of that divine manifestation, not that the Form was revealed to strengthen Arjuna's faith. The Lord Himself said, "I cannot reveal this Form except to such devotees as are single-minded in their devotion. Neither by (studying) the Vedas, nor by sacrifices, nor by gifts, nor by austere penance, can this Form be seen." This clearly proves that Arjuna was supremely devout and single-minded, and was a devotee of the first order. The Lord has explained single-minded devotion and its spiritual consequence in the following terms:—

मत्कर्मकृन्मत्परमो मद्भक्तः सङ्गवर्जितः ।
निर्वैरः सर्वभूतेषु यः स मामेति पाण्डव ॥

(Gītā XI. 55)

"O Arjuna, he who, knowing everything as belonging to Me, performs sacrifices, charities, austerities and other duties for Me alone, who has Me for his goal, that is, knowing Me to be the supreme refuge and goal is intent on attaining Me; who is devoted to Me, that is, who is constantly engaged in hearing and chanting My name, reflecting on My virtues, meditating on My glory, and studying and discoursing on My secret; who is free from attachment, that is, has no attraction for wife, children or worldly riches; who bears enmity towards no creature; such a person of single-minded devotion reaches Me."

(3) Imagining that, so far as he was concerned, the practice of disinterested action and devotion in the form of

taking refuge in the Lord was the main theme of the Gītā, Arjuna kept the same particularly in mind. He held it to be the 'profoundest' part of the teaching, as mentioned by the Lord Himself. He did not pay much attention to the Knowledge aspect, considering that to be subsidiary to self-surrendering devotion. In the present connection also he does not ask for elucidation of that 'profoundest' part of the teaching, viz., the question of Self-surrender, because that Knowledge mixed with Bhakti he remembered perfectly well. It is therefore that the Lord said in reply that in the course of His preaching the Gītā He conveyed to Arjuna the 'secret' eternal Knowledge:—

श्रावितस्त्वं मया गुह्यं ज्ञापितश्च सनातनम्॥

(Mahābhārata, Aśwamedhaparva XVI. 9)

The use of the word 'secret' (गुह्य) in this connection also proves the same thing. After administering this admonition, whatever was conveyed by the Lord to Arjuna, unlike the Gītā, was altogether free from any reference either to disinterested action or to the question of self-surrender to the Lord. He dealt with the Knowledge aspect alone, which had escaped the memory of Arjuna.

(4) The inability expressed by the Lord did not mean that it was not possible for Him to repeat the discourse on that Knowledge, or that He had forgotten it. It is altogether unjustifiable to entertain any such idea in connection with the Lord, who embodies in Himself Sāt, Cit and Ānanda (Truth, Knowledge and Bliss). The intention of the Lord when He expressed the inability was to enhance the glory of Jñānayoga. The teacher admonishes the disciple thus—"The knowledge that I imparted to you was of a very high order, and you did not care to retain it. The instruction on the Knowledge of Self should not be treated as a light-hearted talk which could be repeated at pleasure." In the same way, by 'inability' the Lord

meant that a discourse on such a profound subject could not be repeated to a person who was so careless. When Ṛṣis like Uddālaka, Dadhīci, Satyakāma and others spoke on Brahmavidyā (Knowledge of Brahma), it is held that they spoke only once. The knowledge of Brahma is such that to a qualified person it has to be imparted only once, and there arises no need to repeat the instruction. The Lord, therefore, addressing Arjuna, said—"The instruction on Brahmavidyā you have forgotten; that was a great mistake on your part." But noticing the intensity of Arjuna's desire, He repeated the instruction to him. Had He forgotten all about it, how could He repeat the instruction? The implication of the word योगयुक्त (being attached in Yoga) is—"at that time I conveyed that Knowledge to you with My whole mind and heart concentrated on it." This meant a sort of admonition to Arjuna, and telling him in effect—"I cannot so often concentrate on it and repeat the instruction to you; I am not so free of other engagements that I should make it a function to repeat the instruction to you so that you may conveniently forget it as soon as it is repeated. This is not desirable for a man of your position, inasmuch as it means an insult to Brahmavidyā (Knowledge of Brahma) itself." The incident was made only an occasion for teaching us all that instruction on Brahmavidyā should be received with the mind concentrated on it, and the instructor should impart it to a qualified person alone, who can assimilate it as soon as it is received.

Although Arjuna was not qualified for Brahmavidyā and was meant for the practice of disinterested action and self-surrender, and that was why the 'profoundest' teaching of self-surrender was imparted to him as the final word of the Gītā, yet it was but proper for the Lord to admonish him for having so conveniently forgotten His valuable teaching. One who has surrendered himself should never forget the

instructions of his object of adoration. From this incident it should not be concluded that Knowledge represented a higher stage of realization, and that the practice of disinterested action or self-surrendering devotion represented a lower stage. The goal of the two being the same, either of them cannot be called higher or lower. Arjuna was a man of action and a devotee, hence that was the path suitable for him.

(5) That it was possible for the Lord to repeat His instruction, must have been made clear by what has been said above. Bhagavān Śrī Vyāsa was a great Yogī; he learnt everything through the power of Yoga, and conveyed the same to us. This was in no way surprising for one through whose power of Yoga Sañjaya was enabled to acquire the gift of divine vision.

(6) Śrī Vyāsadeva's intention here is to convey that there are portions in his work where the original words have been retained as they were, while there are other portions which represent materials gathered and arranged by him. In portions containing the instructions of the Lord to Arjuna, many of the verses have been bodily reproduced; in some places the prose has been rendered into verse, and the connecting link has been supplied by introducing some historical facts. Portions containing description of the conditions of Duryodhana, Sañjaya, Arjuna or Dhṛtarāṣṭra are Vyāsadeva's own composition. It should not be concluded from this that the entire thing was a fiction coming out of the fertile imagination of Vyāsa. For the fact is that Śrī Vyāsadeva has recorded the correct history, knowing the entire facts through the power of Yoga.



Sāṅkhyayoga in the Gītā

One gentleman has asked me the following question:—

“What is the conception of Saṁnyāsa according to the Bhagavadgītā?”

It is very difficult to give the keynote of the ‘Gītā’. It is such a mysterious book that, even though many an erudite scholar and a pious saint has applied his brain to it and expressed his views about it, it still continues to open ever new and valuable vistas of thought to those who seek to dive deep into it. How, then, could it be possible to expound its true meaning? Although it is something beyond my capacity to give any dissertation on the ‘Bhagavadgītā’, I hereby venture to place before the readers my own ideas on the subject, which I have been able to form according to my own poor lights. Nothing is farther from my intention than to cast any reflection on any particular class, order, sect, creed or commentator. My object is simply to express my own ideas.

There is a wide divergence of views about the ‘Saṁnyāsa’ as understood in the ‘Bhagavadgītā’:—

(1) One school of thought says that the ‘Gītā’ offers two distinct paths of spiritual discipline, viz., ‘Saṁnyāsa’ or the Path of Renunciation and ‘Karmayoga’ or the Path of Action. Of these the former is the principal and direct means of attaining liberation. It consists in the complete renunciation (संन्यास) of all forms of action as a result of right knowledge (सम्यक्ज्ञान), viz., the knowledge that action leads to bondage. In other words, it means entering the order of recluses (संन्यासाश्रम) as prescribed by the Śāstras (scriptures).

(2) There is another school which holds that, although

one can attain God by entering the order of 'Samnyāsa', i.e., by renouncing all forms of action as a result of right knowledge, 'Gītā' does not deal with this order, and even if it does so anywhere, it treats it as a matter of secondary importance. 'Gītā' treats of the path of disinterested action (निष्कामकर्मयोग) alone; nay, even the term 'Samnyāsa' has been generally used therein in the sense of 'Nişkāma Karmayoga'.

(3) There is a third school which, though it admits the necessity of entering the order of 'Samnyāsa' as prescribed by the Śāstras, nevertheless recognizes 'Sāṅkhya' and 'Karmayoga' as two distinct and independent paths leading to one and the same goal, viz., God-realization. It does not, however, take the term 'Sāṅkhya' or 'Samnyāsa' to mean the order of recluses. It interprets 'Samnyāsa' as identifying himself with Brahma, the embodiment of Truth, Knowledge and Bliss remains constantly established in it disclaiming authorship of all actions.

There are some other minor schools besides; but they are all covered by one or other of the above three schools. Now let us consider which of these three views is the most rational and convincing. With this end in view we shall examine each view individually.

(1) If we accept the first view, viz., that 'Samnyāsa' (renunciation of all forms of action) is the only means of attaining liberation, we shall presently see that it militates against the following dictum of the Lord in the 'Bhagavadgītā':—

यत्साङ्ख्यैः प्राप्यते स्थानं तद्योगैरपि गम्यते।

(V. 5)

"The Yogīs (Karmayogīs) reach the same destination as the Sāṅkhyas—the followers of the 'Sāṅkhya-Mārga' or the Path of knowledge". Here the Lord has in no equivocal

terms recognised 'Karmayoga' as an independent spiritual discipline like 'Sāṅkhyayoga'.

Besides, in the very next verse 'Samnyāsa' and 'Karmayoga' have been called equally conducive to the highest good, nay, 'Karmayoga' has been declared to be superior. Under such circumstances how can it be believed that 'Karmayoga' is not an independent means of attaining liberation. Of course, the two paths are radically different from each other and those eligible for the one must necessarily differ in temperament from those who are qualified for the other. Nay, the two paths cannot be followed at one and the same time, although they can be followed by one and the same individual at different times. Thus it is proved that both the paths, though different from one another, lead to the same goal, i.e., liberation. Now let us consider whether the term 'Samnyāsa' here denotes the order of recluses as prescribed in the Śāstras or something else. Arjuna puts the following question to the Lord:—

संन्यासं कर्मणां कृष्ण पुनर्योगं च शंससि।
यच्छ्रेय एतयोरेकं तन्मे ब्रूहि सुनिश्चितम्॥

(V. 1)

“O Kṛṣṇa! You extol both complete renunciation and due performance of actions in one breath. Pray tell me definitely which of the two is superior.”

Now, on the basis of the above couplet it may be urged that the term 'Samnyāsa' has been used in the “Bhagavadgītā” in the sense of the order of recluses as prescribed in the Śāstras or the renunciation of actions the performance of which has been enjoined upon us. This interpretation, however, does not appear to be warranted by reason, as the Lord has not extolled any particular order or the renunciation of actions in any of the preceding verses. The word 'Samnyāsa' occurring in the above verse cannot therefore be interpreted as above.

He has, on the contrary, extolled at several places transcendental knowledge (ज्ञान), good qualities like detachment (वैराग्य) and disclaiming authorship of all actions bodily, organic and mental. Nay, He has also pointed out the necessity of a wise man (ज्ञानी) performing actions that are ordained by the Śāstras through his body (vide Gītā III. 20-23, 25-27, 29, 33 and IV. 15). No doubt the order of 'Sannyāsa', when coupled with right knowledge, offers greater facility for the attainment of liberation; but even there, to my mind, it is right knowledge and not the order of 'Sannyāsa', which is responsible for liberation and that can be acquired by all irrespective of caste or order (vide Gītā VI. 1-2).

Moreover, it is conclusively proved in the 'Bhagavadgītā' that complete renunciation of all forms of action is not possible:-

न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् ।
कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥

(III. 5)

"No one can remain inert even for a moment. Everyone is helplessly driven to action by one's innate qualities."

Even if anyone renounces any particular action, the renunciation thereof has been recognized by the 'Bhagavadgītā' as something born out of ignorance (तमस्).

नियतस्य तु संन्यासः कर्मणो नोपपद्यते ।
मोहान्तस्य परित्यागस्तामसः परिकीर्तितः ॥

(XVIII. 7)

"It is not therefore desirable to renounce action that is prescribed by the Śāstras. Its renunciation through ignorance has been styled as तामस (partaking of 'Tamas')."

And mere formal renunciation of all outward actions does not lead to perfection.

न च सन्न्यसनादेव सिद्धिं समधिगच्छति ॥

(III. 4)

Nay, in the very next verse, dwelling in the mind on the objects of senses while wilfully refraining from using the tongue (speech) as well as the other senses (of action) has been deprecated and branded as an act of hypocrisy. Later on it has been pointed out that he who practises 'Karmayoga' with the organs duly brought under control and without attachment has been called praiseworthy (Gītā III. 6-7).

In view of what has been said above, if we take 'Saṁnyāsa' to mean formal renunciation of outward actions only, there is no possibility of its leading to liberation, and in that case the following dictum of the Lord, occurring in Chapter V, stands contradicted:—

संन्यासः कर्मयोगश्च निःश्रेयसकरावुभौ ।

(V. 2)

"Both 'Saṁnyāsa' and 'Karmayoga' are conducive to the highest good."

For one who formally renounces outward actions only has been called a तामस त्यागी (a relinquisher of the तामस or lowest type), as pointed out above.

The word 'निःश्रेयस' in the above verse and 'सिद्धि' in verse 4 of Chapter III both denote salvation. If, on the other hand, 'Siddhi' is taken to signify a stage lower than salvation and not salvation itself, the view that mere relinquishment of action does not lead to salvation is strengthened. For, if it does not enable one to acquire an accomplishment of a lower order, how can it lead to liberation which is the highest achievement of human life? Considering all these points, we are led to believe that the word 'Saṁnyāsa' has been used in the 'Bhagavadgītā' in the sense of 'Jñānayoga' (the path of Knowledge) and that the latter has got to do only with the mental outlook rather than with any external condition of life. Nor has it anything to do with a particular caste or order: it is, on the other hand, an exalted means of

God-realization, which can be resorted to by all irrespective of caste or order.

Some people believe that the eligibility for treading the path of Knowledge is confined to the order of 'Saṁnyāsa' alone; but this, too, is not correct. Had it been so, the Lord would not have incited Arjuna to warfare in course of His comprehensive discourse on 'Sāṅkhyaniṣṭhā', contained in verses 11-30 of Chapter II. In Chapter XVIII, when Arjuna asks the Lord clearly to define त्याग (relinquishment) and संन्यास (renunciation), the Lord at the very outset defines त्याग as फलासक्तित्याग (i. e., relinquishment of the fruit of actions and attachment thereto), and later on, while offering to enunciate the doctrine of 'Sāṅkhya' or 'Saṁnyāsa' goes on to tell Arjuna in plain words that he who ascribes the authorship of natural actions (which are attributable to five causes) to the mere (pure) Self ('Ātmā') on account of perverted intelligence, is silly: he is unable to comprehend the nature of the Self rightly. In other words, he who attributes the authorship of an action to himself is not a 'Sāṅkhyayogī' (a follower of the Path of Knowledge). A 'Sāṅkhyayogī', has been characterised as below:—

यस्य नाहङ्कृतो भावो बुद्धिर्यस्य न लिप्यते।

(XVIII. 17)

“One who does not feel that he is the doer of an action and whose intellect is not affected by worldly objects and actions (is a real Sāṅkhyayogī). Hence 'Saṁnyāsa' means casting off egoism (अहंकार). Had the Lord taken 'Saṁnyāsa' to mean formal renunciation of actions, He could not have insisted on their mental renunciation (vide Gītā V. 13).

This proves that 'Sāṅkhya' or 'Saṁnyāsa' does not mean formal relinquishment of actions, and that the path of disinterested action is a direct means of attaining liberation just like 'Sāṅkhyayoga'.

(2) If, on the other hand, it is believed, as held by the second school, that the 'Gītā' treats of the path of disinterested action only, and that the word 'Samnyāsa' also signifies the same, this too does not appeal to us, as the Lord has in the beginning of Chapter III set forth both the paths separately for different types of aspirants, and thereby silenced the doubts entertained by Arjuna:-

लोकेऽस्मिन्निविधा निष्ठा पुरा प्रोक्ता मयानघ।
ज्ञानयोगेन साङ्ख्यानां कर्मयोगेन योगिनाम्॥

(III. 3)

In Chapter II the two paths have been severally dealt with one after the other. Having discussed the 'Sāṅkhyayoga', the Lord says:—

एषा तेऽभिहिता साङ्ख्ये बुद्धिर्योगे त्विमां शृणु।

(II. 39)

“So far I have set forth the viewpoint of the 'Sāṅkhyayogī'. Now I proceed to present to you the other view, viz., that of the 'Karmayogī'.”

Several other texts could be quoted from the 'Bhagavadgītā' to show that the two paths have been separately dealt with therein (vide Chapter V. 1-5). No doubt both the paths ultimately lead to the same goal, viz., God; but the two radically differ from each other; nay, the followers of the two paths adopt different modes of action and different lines of thought. Their mental outlook and procedure are also divergent. A 'Karmayogī' looks upon his actions, their fruit, God and himself as distinct entities, so long as he practises this Yoga. He solely depends upon God and performs all actions in a spirit of utter dedication to Him, relinquishing their fruit and all attachment thereto (vide Gītā III. 30; IV. 20; V. 10; IX. 27-28; XII. 11-12; XVIII. 56-57).

A 'Sāṅkhyayogī', on the other hand, disclaims the authorship of all actions performed with the instrumentality

of the mind, the senses and the body, knowing that all qualities which have their origin in 'Māyā' (Ignorance) function in qualities, and solely abides forever in the omnipresent, all-existent, all-intelligent and all-blissful God (vide Gītā III. 28; V. 8-9, 13; VI. 31; XIII. 29-30; XIV. 19-20; XVIII. 17, 49—55).

A 'Karmayogī' claims the authorship of his actions (vide V. 11), while a 'Sāṅkhyayogī' does not (vide V. 8-9). The former dedicates the fruit of actions performed by himself to the Lord (vide IX. 27-28), whereas the latter does not recognize action performed with the instrumentality of the mind and the senses as actions at all. While a 'Karmayogī' looks upon God as distinct from him (vide XII. 6-7), a 'Sāṅkhyayogī' always identifies himself with Him (vide VI. 29—31; VII. 19; XVIII. 20). A 'Karmayogī' recognizes the existence of Matter (प्रकृति) and material objects (vide XVIII. 9, 61), whereas a 'Sāṅkhyayogī' does not recognize the existence of anything else besides 'Brahma' (God) (vide XIII. 30). If we ever find him recognizing the existence of anything else, it is only by way of assumption (अध्यारोप) in order to bring it home to others, and not in sooth. He regards matter as a phantom (माया) and not as something substantial. A 'Karmayogī' while holding actions to be responsible for their fruit, regards himself as a relinquisher of their fruit and attachment thereto, and recognizes the existence of actions and their fruit as separate entities. A 'Sāṅkhyayogī', on the other hand, does not recognize the existence of actions and their fruit, nor does he regard himself as concerned with them in anyway. A 'Karmayogī' performs actions whereas they proceed automatically from the mind and body of a 'Sāṅkhyayogī', who does not perform them (vide V. 14). The liberation of a 'Karmayogī' is brought about by his pure disinterestedness, his self-surrender to the Lord and divine grace (vide II. 51; XVIII. 56) whereas the

liberation of a 'Sāṅkhyayogī' is attributable to his remaining constantly and absolutely merged in the all-existent, all-intelligent and all-blissful God (vide V. 17-24). Thus, even though the goal attainable by them is the same, the two paths are widely divergent and altogether independent. There is no doubt that the Lord prescribed for Arjuna the path of disinterested action combined with devotion, deeming it suitable for him; but the 'Bhagavadgītā' also contains an equally detailed exposition of the Path of Knowledge. Nay, at places the Lord has spoken very highly of it. He calls 'Karmayoga' superior to 'Jñānayoga' simply because it is the easier of the two, and because it can be practised even by those who feel their identity with the body (देहाभिमानी), whereas the path of Knowledge is far more difficult to tread (vide Gītā V. 2—6). This proves that the 'Gītā' preaches both the paths. It does not preach 'Karmayoga' alone, nor does it confine itself to an exposition of 'Sāṅkhyayoga'. Nor is it true that the term 'Samnyāsa' denotes 'Karmayoga'.

The above exposition would reveal that the 'Gītā' preaches both the above paths and that the term 'Sāṅkhya' or 'Samnyāsa' occurring therein does not mean formal relinquishment of actions.

(3) Now a careful consideration of the arguments advanced by the third school would make one believe that they are more cogent and convincing. Really speaking, the term 'Samnyāsa' has been used in the 'Gītā' in the sense of 'Sāṅkhyayoga' or the path of Knowledge. Words and expressions like 'Samnyāsa', 'Sāṅkhyayoga' and 'Jñānayoga' denote one and the same path. Verses 49—55 of Chapter XVIII contain a lengthy exposition of this path. The 'Samnyāsa' which has been declared in verse 49 as leading to परमां नैष्कर्म्यं सिद्धिं (perfection of freedom from obligation) is nothing but 'Jñānayoga'. A critical examination of these verses will

show that fixing one's mind on God as identical with one's own self as well as the result of that concentration is what is known as पराभक्ति (highest form of devotion), and that is the highest stage of 'Jñānayoga'. One who practises this type of 'Jñānayoga' looks upon all the objects and activities of this world as an amplification of 'Māyā' (Illusion), which is itself composed of the three qualities, and regards himself as an unconcerned witness thereof (vide Gītā XIV. 19-20). He is always united with 'Brahma' and moves in 'Brahma' (vide Gītā VI. 31; V. 26). He perceives the whole stock of actions as dwelling in Māyā (vide Gītā III. 27-28). He totally disclaims the authorship of all actions, bodily, mental and organic. The senses move among their objects; the 'Ātmā' (Self) transcends them and is entirely different from them; so thinking, he does not feel himself to be the agent during the period of his spiritual discipline. Nay, even in 'Māyā' he perceives an expansion of 'Brahma' and this outlook of his makes everything appear to him as 'Brahma'. He looks upon 'Prakṛti' (Matter) and its effects as distinct from the Self, transitory and ephemeral, and his own self as a non-doer and non-enjoyer; and, feeling the presence of the 'Ātmā' everywhere, he perseveres in his discipline. And eventually when the existence of everything else than 'Brahma' is eliminated, he attains that highest pinnacle of wisdom which baffles all description and where he perceives nothing but 'Brahma'. His mind, intellect and heart, etc., are merged in 'Brahma' and nothing remains except the one 'Vāsudeva' (vide Gītā V. 17; VII. 19).

He looks upon both the moving (animate) and the motionless (inanimate) as a manifestation of god Himself. Nay, he finds Him pervading and permeating all objects (vide Gītā XIII. 15).

Such a 'Samnyāsī' is capable of activity in the eyes of

the world, both during the period of discipline as well as after attaining the stage of perfection (सिद्धावस्था); but the actions performed by him are no longer in the nature of actions, inasmuch as he looks upon all worldly objects as identical with 'Brahma' and does not claim their authorship (vide Gītā XVIII. 17).

The above dissertation reveals that, according to the third school, the word 'Samnyāsa' has not been used in the 'Bhagavadgītā' in the sense of the order of 'Samnyāsa' but it means disclaiming the authorship of all actions and constantly remaining one with God who is all-pervading, all-existent, all-intelligent and all-blissful. Hence it can be practised by all irrespective of caste and order. It is also known by the name of 'Jñānayoga'. This is what has been called as 'Samnyāsa' in the 'Bhagavadgītā.'

It is equally true that the 'Gītā' also contains a detailed exposition of another independent discipline known as 'Karmayoga'. It consists in renouncing the fruit of actions and attachment thereto and performing them as a behest from the Lord and for His sake and with a balanced mind. This has been denoted by the terms समत्वयोग, बुद्धियोग, कर्मयोग, तदर्थकर्म, मदर्थकर्म, मत्कर्म, etc., in the 'Gītā'. Of the various types of 'Karmayoga', that in which 'Bhakti' (Devotion) predominates is preferable and an aspirant who follows this path speedily attains perfection (vide Gītā VI. 47).

Thus both the paths lead to perfection. This should, however, not be taken to mean that I am opposed to entering the order of 'Samnyāsa' as prescribed in the Śāstras or that I do not believe that one who is leading the life of a recluse is incapable of attaining liberation through right knowledge (सम्यग्ज्ञान). What I mean is this that the 'Samnyāsa' preached by the 'Gītā' does not lay stress on any particular order. It takes its stand solely on

transcendental wisdom (ज्ञान). Hence the teachings of the 'Gītā' are open to all.

I further believe that the order of 'Sāṁnyāsa' offers greater facilities to those who follow the Path of Knowledge.

Now, some people are of the opinion that the term 'Sāṅkhya' occurring in the 'Gītā' denotes the Sāṅkhya system, which is believed to have been founded by the Sage Kapila. Careful thought would, however, reveal that this view is not correct. The doctrine of 'Sāṅkhya' preached in the 'Bhagavadgītā' is not the same as the Sāṅkhya system attributed to Kapila: it is, on the other hand, connected with transcendental wisdom. We find the terms प्रकृति and पुरुष used in verses 19-20 of Chapter XIII. These terms appear to have been borrowed from the 'Sāṅkhya' Philosophy. In fact, however, they are quite different from the terms used in the 'Sāṅkhya' system.

The Sāṅkhya system believes in a plurality of Puruṣas (souls) and holds them to be separate entities. The 'Gītā', on the other hand, recognizes only one Puruṣa as appearing in multitudinous forms (vide Gītā XIII. 22; XVIII. 20). According to the 'Gītā' the several entities representing the various creatures are, in reality, the forms of one and the same Being (Puruṣa). The Sāṅkhya system, moreover, does not acknowledge a divine creator of this universe. The Gītā, however, expressly admits the existence of such a Creator. This proves that the 'Sāṅkhya' preached in the 'Gītā' is different from the Sāṅkhya system of the Sage Kapila.

There is one thing more to be mentioned in this connection, the 'Dhyānayoga' (the Path of Meditation) preached in the 'Gītā' is indispensable for both the paths. That is why the Lord did not mention it as a separate path. 'Dhyānayoga' accompanies disinterested action taking God (the object of meditation) as a separate entity, whereas in

‘Sāṅkhyayoga’ He is meditated upon as identical with the aspirant. ‘Sāṅkhyayoga’ cannot be accomplished without constantly thinking of God, who is all-existent, all-intelligent and all-blissful, as identical with the aspirant.

‘Dhyānayoga’ alone is capable of leading an aspirant to final beatitude, even though it may not be accompanied by either of the two paths described above:—

ध्यानेनात्मनि पश्यन्ति केचिदात्मानमात्मना ।
अन्ये साङ्ख्येन योगेन कर्मयोगेन चापरे ॥

(Gītā XIII. 24)

This is, however, not recognized as an independent path, as meditation on God as identical with the aspirant is regarded as constituting ‘Sāṅkhyayoga,’ while that on God as a separate entity is considered to be a part of ‘Karmayoga.’ It has been mentioned separately simply because it does not require either actions or their relinquishment. It can, on the other hand, prove helpful to both. Mere ‘Dhyānayoga’ can enable a man to attain liberation, even though he may not cling to or relinquish actions.

Even though very efficacious and independent, this discipline has not been recognized as a separate path. It is therefore advisable that an aspirant should endeavour to realize God by having recourse to any of the aforesaid two paths, according to one’s capacity and combining it with ‘Dhyānayoga’.



Gītā and the Yoga-Sūtras

(A Comparative Study)

The Yoga-Sūtras occupy a very high place in the philosophical literature of India. The author of the book was the great sage Patañjali. The Yoga-Sūtras contain ideas at once profound, worth assimilating, appealing to the heart and useful in life. The book is indispensable for those who aspire for lasting happiness. It is not known whether the Yoga-Sūtras were composed after the Bhagavadgītā or before it. Yet there is no doubt about the fact that portions of the two books present striking similarities. In some cases the same words are used with a slight modification, while in others there is remarkable affinity in spirit. The following aphorisms of the Yoga-Sūtras may be quoted in this connection:—

1. अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः ।

(I. 12)

“It (the mind) can be controlled by constant practice and dispassion.”

2. स तु दीर्घकालनैरन्तर्यसत्कारासेवितो दृढभूमिः ।

(I. 14)

“It (the practice) becomes firmly rooted only when it is repeated for a long time with strict regularity and earnestness.”

3. तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः । तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम् ।

(I. 27-28)

“He (God) is denoted by the syllable Om. The muttering of this word and pondering over its meaning constitute what is known as ईश्वरप्रणिधान or contemplation of God.”

4. परिणामतापसंस्कारदुःखैर्गुणवृत्तिविरोधाच्च दुःखमेव सर्वं विवेकिनः ।

(II. 15)

“To a wise man there is nothing but pain in this world inasmuch as all worldly enjoyments are painful in consequence, nay, their very presence is painful as also their memory, and because there are conflicting tendencies in the mind.”

Compare with the above aphorisms the following verses of Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā:—

1. अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥

(VI. 35)

“The mind is brought under control by constant practice and dispassion.”

2. अनन्यचेताः सततं यो मां स्मरति नित्यशः ।

(VIII. 14)

“He who constantly thinks upon Me, not thinking ever of any other.....”

3. ओमित्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन् ।

(VIII. 13)

“Reciting Om, the one-syllabled Eternal, and thinking upon Me,.....”

4. ये हि संस्पर्शजा भोगा दुःखयोनय एव ते ।

आद्यन्तवन्तः कौन्तेय न तेषु रमते बुधः ॥

(V. 22)

“The enjoyments that are born of contact (of senses with their objects), they are verily causes of pain; for they have beginning and end, O son of Kuntī; not in them rejoice the wise.”

Besides the above there are some more aphorisms in the Yoga-Sūtras which convey the same sense as is contained in some verses of Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā. For instance, there is an aphorism in the Yoga-Sūtras which runs as follows:—

विशेषाविशेषलिङ्गमात्रालिङ्गानि गुणपर्वाणि ।

(II. 19)

“The class known as Viśeṣa (consisting of sixteen

evolutes, viz., the five great elements, the five organs of perception, the five organs of action and the mind), the group designated as *Aviśeṣa* (consisting of *Ahaṅkāra* or the ego and the five subtle elements or *Tanmātras*, *Liṅga* or the Cosmic Intellect (समष्टिबुद्धि) and *Alīṅga* or Unmanifested Nature (अव्याकृत प्रकृति)—these are the different stages (अवस्था) of *Prakṛti*.”

The following verse of *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* states the same thing more explicitly:—

महाभूतान्यहङ्कारो बुद्धिरव्यक्तमेव च ।
इन्द्रियाणि दशैकं च पञ्च चेन्द्रियगोचराः ॥

(XIII. 5)

“The five great elements, individuality or ego, Intellect and also the unmanifested, the ten senses and the one (mind) and the five objects of senses (these, combined with a few others, constitute what is known as the Field and its modifications).”

The similarities pointed out above have led some scholars to conclude that *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* was composed after the *Yoga-Sūtras* and that the former has borrowed many of its conceptions from the latter. Nay, some have gone to the length of believing that *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* is only an adaptation of the *Yoga-Sūtras* or at best, a work propounding the same views as those of the *Yoga-Sūtras*. To my mind this view is not correct. Whether *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* was composed later than the *Yoga-Sūtras* or before it, I am not in a position to say. Of course, this much can be safely asserted that the outlook of *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* is far wider and its doctrines much more comprehensive and universal than those of the *Yoga-Sūtras*.

The term *Yoga* in the *Yoga-Sūtras* is restricted to one sense only, while in the *Bhagavadgītā* it has a very wide significance and covers various shades of meaning. To

indicate the wide range of its meaning it will suffice to point out that while, on the one hand, it signifies the end of all spiritual disciplines, viz., God-realization, it stands, on the other hand, for the various disciplines such as Niṣkāma Karma (Disinterested Action), Bhakti (Devotion), Dhyāna (Meditation), Jñāna (Knowledge), etc.

The Yoga-Sūtras describe the nature of Īśwara (God) in the following aphorisms:-

क्लेशकर्मविपाकाशयैरपरामृष्टः पुरुषविशेष ईश्वरः ।
 तत्र निरतिशयं सर्वज्ञबीजम् ।
 पूर्वेषामपि गुरुः कालेनानवच्छेदात् ।

(I. 24—26)

“God is a Supreme Spirit altogether unconnected with the five afflictions or Kleśas, viz., Avidyā (Nescience), Ahantā (egoism), Rāga (Attachment), Dveṣa (Aversion) and Abhiniveśa (dread of death), Karmas (actions) and their fruits in the shape of pleasure and pain, and the seed of action (वासना).”

“He has a seed of the highest form of omniscience.”

“He is greater than the ancient ones (creators of the world such as Brahmā), being unbounded by time.”

Now let us see what the Gītā says about God and compare it with the conception of God as contained in the Yoga-Sūtras. The Gītā says:—

कविं पुराणमनुशासितार-
 मणोरणीयांसमनुस्मरेद्यः ।
 सर्वस्य धातारमचिन्त्यरूप-
 मादित्यवर्णं तमसः परस्तात् ॥

(VIII. 9)

सर्वेन्द्रियगुणाभासं सर्वेन्द्रियविवर्जितम् ।
 असक्तं सर्वभृच्चैव निर्गुणं गुणभोक्तृ च ॥

(XIII. 14)

ब्रह्मणो हि प्रतिष्ठाहममृतस्याव्ययस्य च।
शाश्वतस्य च धर्मस्य सुखस्यैकान्तिकस्य च॥

(XIV. 27)

यस्मात्क्षरमतीतोऽहमक्षरादपि चोत्तमः।
अतोऽस्मि लोके वेदे च प्रथितः पुरुषोत्तमः॥

(XV. 18)

According to the above verses, God is omniscient, beginningless, the Ruler of all, minuter than the minute, the supporter of all, of form unimaginable, ever conscious, all-effulgence, beyond the darkness of nescience, absolute existence, pure intelligence and eternal bliss, the perceiver of all sense-objects, though Himself devoid of senses, free from attachment, the supporter of everything and the enjoyer of qualities (Guṇas or the modes of Prakṛti) though Himself beyond qualities, the support of the indestructible Reality, of immortality, of the Eternal Law and of integral and immutable bliss, and the Supreme Being altogether beyond the destructible matter and superior to the spirit enmeshed in Māyā.

Īśwara, according to the Yoga-Sūtras is unaffected by the three Guṇas; while, according to the Bhagavadgītā, He is altogether beyond these Guṇas. Whereas the Īśwara of the Yoga-Sūtras has been recognized as the Supreme Spirit because of His being a Superior Being (पुरुषविशेष) free from the five Kleśas, good and evil actions, pleasure and pain and the seed of actions, the Īśwara of the Gītā has been called the Highest Being (पुरुषोत्तम) because of His being altogether beyond the three Guṇas, omnipresent and superior to the Jīva enmeshed in Māyā or Illusion. The Īśwara of the Yoga-Sūtras is greater than the ancientmost progenitors of the world, being unbounded by time; but the Īśwara of the Gītā is the ultimate support even of the indestructible Reality and the Eternal Law, and of unending bliss. Though

beyond the three Guṇas, He enjoys them through His unthinkable power and supports all.

Even so the conception of Surrender to God (ईश्वरशरणागति) as contained in the Gītā is very lofty.

Meditation on God (ईश्वरप्रणिधान) as recommended in the Yoga-Sūtras is only one of the several means prescribed for acquiring mind-control (चित्तवृत्तिनिरोध), such as constant practice (अभ्यास), dispassion (वैराग्य), etc. That is why the Yoga-Sūtras make it optional by adding the particle 'वा' (or) to it in 'ईश्वरप्रणिधानाद्वा' (or by meditation on God). But, according to the Gītā, surrender to God is the crown of all Sādhanaś or disciplines (vide IX. 32; XVIII. 62, 66).

The reward of meditation, according to the Gītā, is also superior to that held out by the Yoga-Sūtras. According to the Yoga-Sūtras, the utility of meditation lies in setting at rest the operation of the five Kleśas 'ध्यानहेयास्तद्वृत्तयः' (II. 11). The Gītā, however, says:-

ध्यानेनात्मनि पश्यन्ति केचिदात्मानमात्मना ।

(XIII. 24)

"Some by meditation behold the Self in the self (i. e., the heart) with the self (i. e., the sharp and refined intellect)." While, according to the Yoga-Sūtras, meditation only sets at rest the operation of the five Kleśas, according to the Gītā, it can even lead to God-realization.

Such is the difference between the Yoga-Sūtras and the Gītā. The greatest difference lies in the fact that the Gītā embodies the divine utterances of the Lord Himself, who has been characterized as absolute existence, pure intelligence and unending bliss; whereas the Yoga-Sūtras are the production of an enlightened sage and seer only. Although an enlightened soul has no existence apart from God, the latter is peerless in every way.

The above exposition will show that the Gītā is superior

to the Yoga-Sūtras in everyway and that the teachings of the Gītā are also more sublime, profound, universal, intelligible and ideal.

This should not be taken to mean that I regard the Yoga-Sūtras as an ordinary book or that I find some flaw in them. To me the Yoga-Sūtras are a very useful and commendable treatise. What I have written above is only by way of comparison.

